

# JESUS THROUGH JEWISH EYES

A SPIRITUAL COMMENTARY  
ON THE  
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

PART 1  
*Chapters I - IV*



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ANNE MARY PAUL LIBERMANN CSSp  
TRANSLATED BY MYLES L. FAY CSSp

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*Congregation of the Holy Spirit*  
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GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN**



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FRANCIS MARY PAUL LIBERMANN CSSp  
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Jewish Eyes,  
A Spiritual Commentary  
on the  
Gospel of St. John,  
Part I, Chapters I-IV

by Francis Libermann CSSp  
translated by Myles L. Fay CSSp

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*Francis Mary Paul Libermann CSSp*



## Foreword

Those who take up this *Commentary* on St John's Gospel may find it difficult reading. While historians of spirituality have enthused about its mystical qualities, the present day person is in danger of finding style and content so remote from contemporary approaches to Scripture that they may miss some of the treasures that lie within. Treasures undoubtedly lie within these pages to enrich the heart of the believer, of the one who accepts that eternal life is to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Within these reflections on the life of Jesus lies the experience of one who knew Jesus intimately in his own heart. That awareness and quiet contemplative sense of the presence of Jesus, Lord of all, is what these pages communicate.

To arrive at that awareness, however, several hurdles have to be crossed — hurdles of language, thought, unspoken assumption and custom. Not only those of the biblical world but those of the world Francis Libermann lived in — a Franco-German Jewish home, Sulpician spirituality, mid-19th century French Catholic theology with its impoverished scholastic theology, Jansenistic morality, Latinised linguistic style no doubt correctly rendered by the translator, Fr Myles L. Fay, into an equally classical English diction. The journey the reader takes is two-fold — back to mid 19th century France to Francis Libermann — and secondly, in his company, to the faith world of St John. If readers have difficulty extending tolerance and understanding to times and places other than their own, this book is not for them. If they can cross these barriers, then they will find themselves immersed in a profound and loving awareness of the one true God made flesh in Jesus Christ.

Some aspects of Libermann's approach to Scripture may tend to deter present day readers. Accustomed to a reading of Scripture which concentrates on its historical and literary sense, one may find his free-ranging reflections unusual. His approach is more like that of a medieval writer than a modern, though anyone who has used the *lectio divina* method of biblical meditation will probably feel at home with this commentary. Medieval scholars identified four

senses of Scripture, the literal or historical sense; the moral sense which applies the Word of God to human life; the anagogical sense which sees the future life of heaven foreshadowed in the text; the allegorical sense which describes how the New Testament is figured in the Old. Libermann, following the custom of the time, distinguishes broadly the literal and spiritual senses, i.e. the first of these listed above and the other three grouped under the title 'spiritual' sense. Generally speaking, once one accepts this broader approach to Scripture, the spiritual interpretation is readily acceptable.

There is, perhaps, one exception to this. I refer to a practical kind of allegorical interpretation which takes one element in the Bible and hangs a meaning on it which bears no direct relationship to the original text. One example is Libermann's account of the multiplication of the loaves in Jn 6. He sees the five loaves as referring to the five wounds of the passion, the twelve baskets of leftovers as referring to the tribes of Israel, the fragments gathered as signifying unused graces in the Church's treasury. This kind of artificial association may not stir our hearts. However, it forms but a small proportion of the *Commentary's* text. While his deepest purpose is to bring out the spiritual message of the Gospel as he perceives it, the literal sense is the main concern of his exegesis.

His sense of the divine, of its primacy and transcendence, leads Libermann to write at times in language which seems to depreciate human nature and its embodiment in human flesh. The very words *nature* and *flesh* have specific meanings within Libermann's terminology which differ from our everyday speech. We use the words *nature* and *natural* for what is around and within us and for what most befits what the world and we ourselves are. In Libermann's vocabulary *nature* refers to humanity's condition after the Fall. In other words it speaks of that aspect of our being which is prone to sin, which tends towards evil, rebels against God. It is a code-word for our sinful tendencies as opposed to the Godward tendencies provided by grace. Similarly *flesh* for us refers to our humanity — to our bodies, as when we say, "This is more than flesh and blood can bear." *Flesh* for Libermann refers approximately to the same aspect of our being as *nature*, the tendency to spiritual

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blindness and self-centred action which afflicts us all.

Modern readers also find that Libermann undervalues earthly and human realities. His attention and commitment is focused directly on God. This attitude of mind comes partly from his Jansenistic environment, partly from his overriding concern to live in communion with God, to put into practice the first Christian commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37). This of course repeats the injunction of Deuteronomy 6:5 — therefore a command which was in Libermann's mind and heart since early childhood. His own relationships with others show him to have been a warm affectionate friend to members of his own family and fellow missionaries, deeply concerned that his colleagues were adequately provided with food, clothing and the necessities of life. As a missionary superior he repeatedly put his men on guard against neglecting health and well being. His undoubtedly burning zeal for God did not prevent him recognising, using and thanking God for the material blessings which God provided for himself and his followers.

Libermann turns to the theology of Jesus' two natures, human and divine, to comment on the texts in John's Gospel, notably in Chapter V, where he speaks of the joint action of Father and Son. Some readers may have difficulty with this approach. Having two natures, human and divine, implies that in Jesus both his divine mind and will as well as his human mind and will are at work in each situation. In God, one and three, there is only one mind and one will, common to the three persons of the Trinity. Consequently, there is complete unity between the Father and Son in thought and choice. What the Father thinks, the Son thinks, what the Father chooses the Son chooses.

Jesus' humanity is so harmonised with his divine nature, that his human mind and will are perfectly synchronised with his divine mind and will. As a result complete harmony exists in mind and thought at all three levels of activity — between the Father's mind and will, Jesus' divine mind and will and his human mind and will. This in brief is the background to Libermann's commentary on texts such as Jn 5:19, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of

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his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise." This harmony between Father and Son stretches across the range of the Son's actions, human and divine. In his divine nature Jesus does whatever the Father does; in his human nature he thinks and chooses in perfect harmony with his divine thought and choice.

Readers may find that Libermann was so focused on Jesus' divine nature that he minimised his humanity. In this presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, he proposes a supremely transcendental image of Christ whose earthly involvements, even bodily functions like eating and drinking, are a matter of choice. One commentator notes that in this he borders on the unorthodox. One can allow certain liberties of language in this kind of exposition. Nonetheless, the general reader brought up on a 'low Christology', which stresses the humanity of Jesus, may not find Libermann's perspective immediately attractive. However, in prayer one may come to see the direction of his thought which points unswervingly to the ultimate goal of human striving, communion in Christ with the Father. As St Paul might say, our real life is hidden with Christ in God. This is Libermann's perspective. Consequently, his interpretation of the Fourth Gospel refers more to this ultimate stage of human endeavour rather than to any stops along the way.

The majesty and unity of God is one of the great themes running through this commentary as it does through the Gospel of St John. St John's Gospel presents us with what in current theology is termed a 'high Christology' that is a view of Christ which sees him primarily as God, secondarily as man. St John's focus on Christ's divinity is what Libermann takes up and enlarges to fill the screen. His approach to Jesus is that of the devout Jew to Yahweh, one of adoration, submission and self-giving. That same awareness leads him to grapple in his reflection with the problems the text poses, particularly in chapters I and V, of reconciling the unity of God with the diversity of persons — and the unity of the divine person with the duality of natures in the Word-made-flesh. Again, some may find this difficult reading.

Libermann's reflections lead him briefly in Chapter I to expound the theology of the Trinity of his day. Following St Augustine,

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Christian theology saw in the working of the human mind a model which provides a glimpse of how in God there can be one divine nature in three divine persons. The human mind, as the origin of all its activities, comes to know itself through an insight from which flows a concept — a mental ‘word’ or definition of what it has perceived. When what is perceived is good and beautiful, then a movement of the will — in love — takes place. In God this concept, definition or mental ‘word’ which expresses the infinite being of the Father God is the eternal Word of God. This Word is equal in all things to the reality it expresses. The Word (or Son of God as we more commonly name him) is equal to the Father in being because he is the perfect image, replica of the Father. The Father is infinite in being; so too his expression of himself in Word — as an artist might express himself perfectly in music, verse or stone. Similarly, when the Father perceives the wonder of his own being, love flows. And because his being is infinite so too is the love infinite which follows knowledge. That love is, of course, the one we call Holy Spirit. The Spirit is equal to Father and Son in all things precisely because the one who loves — the Father — is infinite. The Spirit too is commensurate with the Father, identical with him in all things except that he is the eternal love of God, directed firstly to the Father himself — and then to creation — to everything and everyone the Father has made. This theology of the Blessed Trinity underlies Libermann’s reflections on the Word who was in the beginning, “...was with God, and ...was God” (Jn 1:1). In the light of these observations, perhaps one should direct the general reader to Chapters II and IV of this present volume as being most useful as spiritual reading.

Finally, the Latin text used in this edition is the one which Francis Libermann followed in his manuscript. The English translation is taken from the Revised Standard Version. In places the *Commentary* follows the French translation the author had to hand. Where this differs notably from the RSV version, the variant is provided in brackets. The *Commentary* is published in English translation primarily as a text for spiritual reflection. Scholars are referred to the critical edition, François Libermann, *Commentaire de Saint Jean*, Nouvelle Cité, Paris, 1987, the work of Frs Joseph Lecuyer, Amedeo



Martins, Bernard Noel, Alphonse Gilbert. English readers are indebted to the untiring labours of Fr Myles L. Fay CSSp for this translation carried out for the most part in difficult mission circumstances. The publishers are grateful to those in Ireland and in Kenya who prepared this text: Fr Thomas O'Sullivan R.I.P., Philomena Powell, Margaret O'Sullivan, Mary Murphy, Deirdre Powell, designers Steven Hope and Alan Ennis.

***Brian Gogan CSSp***  
**General Editor**

# INTRODUCTION

Francis Libermann was not sure himself when he was born, for the *anno domini* calendar had been suspended in France after the French Revolution and it was not always clear when Year 1 of the new order began in different parts of the country. In fact he was born on 12 April 1802 in the Jewish ghetto in Saverne, Alsace, Eastern France, where he was fifth son of the local rabbi. As his father's favourite, he was meant in turn to succeed him. Francis, sensitive and intelligent, gave himself most zealously to his Jewish devotions and studies as celebrated and dictated by his fanatical father. In practice that meant he knew the Old Testament thoroughly in the original languages as well as much of the Talmud. The New Testament did not exist for him or his family and milieu, while a crucifix, as we know from anecdotes of his childhood, was an object of dread.

Unexpectedly some of his older brothers became Catholics when they left the ghetto for studies. Jacob (as he then was) also left home to study but he passed from Judaism into atheism, carefully concealing this from his father. The light came with a copy of St John's Gospel — his preference for it for the rest of his life is no wonder! — in unpointed Hebrew, which a fellow-student, less proficient in Hebrew, asked him to translate. It was not yet the road to Damascus (an apt allusion in Libermann's case) but a firm start. After more study, hesitation and prayer, he suddenly threw himself on his knees and acknowledged that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in whom he believed again, was indeed the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jacob was baptised Francis Mary Paul on Christmas Eve 1826 in Paris. His conversion was total. Straight away he asked to prepare for the priesthood and was admitted to the great St Sulpice seminary, model of strict ecclesiastical training. There he learnt the clerically accepted way of living along with his French religious and spiritual vocabulary, which of itself was ill-equipped for the thoroughly Jewish (and correct, as far as they went) notions of God that he had built up and lived by for 24 years.

Studies progressed satisfactorily until he suddenly and literally fell with epilepsy on the very eve of receiving major orders. That barred one from the priesthood but he was allowed to remain on at the St Sulpice summer residence of Issy on the outskirts of Paris as a sort of bursar's assistant. Here his charism of spiritual director with a particular insight into St John and St Paul showed itself and flowered. Among his admiring student friends at Issy were two who would influence the rest of his life, Eugene Tisserant and Frederick LeVasseur. These two were beginning to dream of helping the liberated slaves of their respective homelands, Haiti and Bourbon (Reunion), both French colonies. They approached Libermann, first as a spiritual guide and then as a possible leader of this 'work', as they called it. Meantime Libermann was invited to leave Paris for the city of Rennes in Brittany to become novice-master of a small group, mostly priests, who constituted the beginnings of a regrouping of the Eudist Congregation after the French Revolution. This was in 1837 and the acolyte Libermann was 35.

On the feast of SS Simon and Jude, 28 October 1839, Francis, in what he considered a supernatural enlightenment, made the decision to throw in his lot with his two friends in founding this work for the Black race. The first thing to do was draw up a rule and present it in Rome. He went to Rome, where he remained exactly twelve months, from Epiphany 1840 to Epiphany 1841. While there he composed this *Commentary on St John's Gospel* as well as his *Provisional Rule* and a detailed *Memorandum* for the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (now the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples).

That year completed, he returned to France, was ordained priest at Amiens in September 1841 (his epileptic fits had largely passed) and governed his young, fervent, zealous, growing apostolic band of missionaries, now called the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary, until his death ten years later at the age of 49. But one more major event of his life must be told. In 1848 at the behest of Rome he fused his society with the Holy Ghost Congregation, which had been founded in Paris in 1703 by a youthful seminarian, Claude-Francis Poullart des Places. Libermann was unanimously elected as the eleventh Superior General of the renewed Holy Ghost Congregation under



the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He died in that capacity on 2 February 1852 and is buried in Paris, as is Claude des Places. He was declared Venerable in 1910. The Holy Ghost Congregation acknowledges both men as its founders.

Francis Libermann composed this *Commentary* during his one-year stay in Rome, 1840, at the age of 38, while still a cleric in minor orders. It has been calculated that he worked swiftly, probably completing it in less than three months, although he kept touching it up for years afterwards, without however, continuing it beyond the verse he had stopped at in Rome: chapter 12, verse 23. He wrote on simple copybook paper with a fair number of erasures, marginal notes and additions. He tells us himself he had only a Latin *New Testament* to work from, did not use or refer to any commentaries and scarcely remembered his theological studies of ten years before.

The physical arrangements were not conducive. He lived in a rented attic at the top of a building (now demolished) near the church of St Louis des Français and the Pantheon. This attic is reconstructed on the roof of the present French seminary in the same area of Rome. It is so low that the sloping roof allows one to stand upright only at one side of the room. The heat of it in the Roman summer, the time he was composing the commentary, must have been stifling. Moreover, he was living very frugally and apprehensively; he was waiting day by day to hear how the authorities had accepted his memorandum on his proposed foundation. As he says, he penned these notes to pass his time in a devout way and had no intention of anyone else ever reading them. Only his confessor's intervention prevented him from burning them. The original MS is kept in the Holy Ghost Congregation archives at Chevilly near Paris.

Twenty years after Fr Libermann's death, the *Commentary* was published in an excellent production at the mission printing-press at Ngazobil near Zuiginchor in present-day Senegal. It seems to have been reproduced from a fair copy made, with most of his writings, by the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny in Paris. Early in this century it was published again with many additional footnotes which are not Libermann's at the Holy Ghost Congregation Motherhouse in Paris. A third edition, completely revised in the

light of the original, was published by Fr Alphonse Gilbert, Nouvelle Cité, Paris 1987; this is the text I have worked from. It has never been printed in English but a typed translation by Fr Walter Van de Putte circulated in some areas of the Holy Ghost Congregation.

Fr Michael Cahill successfully defended a doctorate thesis on the *Commentary* at the Institut Catholique, Paris, in 1987, in which he concluded that the specific references by Libermann to Judaic sources are extremely few. This authoritative work has been published (Michael Cahill CSSp, *Francis Libermann's Commentary on the Gospel of St John, An Investigation of the Rabbinical and French School Influences*, Paraclete Press, Dublin, 1987). Within the Holy Ghost Congregation, issue no 20 of *Spiritual Papers* (December 1986) dealt with selected aspects of the *Commentary*, to which it was dedicated. The standard biographies of Fr Libermann naturally only treat of it summarily.

It is easy enough to situate this work within Francis Libermann's spiritual itinerary. For exactly the first half of his life he lived a thoroughly Jewish spirituality, until the age of 24. The second half was Catholic, divided as follows. At St Sulpice and Issy he was influenced by the French School of spirituality. Indeed it was in the idiom of that school that he learnt the French language, so for religious topics he really had no choice of vocabulary. This period lasted some eleven years. During his two years in Rennes he immersed himself in the spirituality of St John Eudes, going so far as to copy out in his own handwriting much of St John Eudes' works. The MS is preserved in the Eudist archives.

It has been argued in two doctorate theses that Francis at this point made a second break in his spirituality. The first break had been to leave Judaism for Christianity. The second, which can be dated precisely, 28 October 1839, was the break from a seminary-clerical Catholic life to a worldwide missionary and universalist vision of the church. Fr Christopher Burke's thesis (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 1975) plausibly argues that position, while Fr Bernard Kelly's thesis (Institut Catholique, Paris, 1980) (published as *Life Began at Forty*, Dublin, 1982) argues a spiritual development from the same date. The *Commentary* comes at this

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moment, just when the new missionary vision is added to the previous Jewish, atheistic, Sulpician and Eudist influences in his life, not to mention his very individual appropriation of each of these strands and arrangement of their meshing.

Outside the influences of this *Commentary* are the remaining ten years of Libermann's life, during which the missionary and universalist spirituality matured. Whether deliberately or not, this turning point had been clearly indicated by the moment in St John's Gospel where Fr Libermann stopped and, it would seem, never felt an urge to continue beyond. 'Some Greeks' had come to see Jesus, and Jesus says, 'Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified' (Jn 12:23). The missionary work of the Church was starting; so was Francis Libermann's.

How is Libermann's work to be classified among commentaries on St John's Gospel? It has been considered serious enough by the staff of the *École Biblique* in Jerusalem to have been placed in their library; after all a commentary on St John by a convert Jew is not an everyday occurrence and for that reason alone it would deserve attention. A glance will show that it is not in the class of scientific exegesis like modern volumes by Rudolph Schnackenburg or Raymond E. Brown, even though Libermann's knowledge of Hebrew from childhood would be the envy of many scholars. Unfortunately Libermann's was a time when Catholic spirituality underplayed the value of the *Old Testament* and we must regret now that he allowed so little of his vast knowledge of the *Old Testament* to appear in this *Commentary*. It is rather a meditative approach to the Gospel, extracting reflections and lessons from the phrases one by one. With respect it may be compared to some of the patristic commentaries, which in their turn fall short of modern scientific requirements as exegesis, yet are of theological value in their *genre*. Libermann's idea would be that a reading of these pages would drive one to one's knees before the person of Jesus, and the first one he wanted to lead into prayer was himself.

A helpful key to an interpretation may be the autobiographical. In the first chapter especially, where healthy, holy young Jewish men come face to face with Jesus of Nazareth, as Libermann had at 24, Libermann sees his own story in the phrases used both of



Jesus and of the apostles. Later when he castigates the Pharisees for their non-acceptance of Jesus, he is implicitly castigating his father and his Jewish teachers, who did not allow Jesus to enter their lives and change them as he had his. In analysing other interviews of Jesus with people throughout the Gospel, he will have drawn on his wide experience of seminarians and lay people whom he had directed for fifteen years and whose relationships with Jesus he knew in their subtlety.

Finally a word on the translation. Francis Libermann was over twenty when he learnt French. He learnt it sufficiently to make it a clear and adequate instrument for his thoughts but not sufficiently to become a Racine or Victor Hugo (born the same year as Libermann). His vocabulary remained limited. The work will never be crowned by the *Académie Française* for its purity of diction or for its contribution to the French language. I have translated it *tel quel*, while breaking the periods into shorter sentences and using more of the active voice of the verb. But the translation remains literal, there are no paraphrases, no omissions, and the repetitiousness of some duller passages remains. The spirituality of the French School provided the only religious terminology he possessed in French. This could conceivably be transposed into terms current in some modern writing, terms like enrichment, commitment, polarity, dynamics, vulnerability, brokenness, awareness, challenging, beautiful, exciting, having a feel for or a sense of, being authentic and so on, but I have not used them; they would ring false in the context.

I wish to thank Fr Brian Gogan sincerely for undertaking this publication as well as for his felicitous choice of the main title, and all those over a lifetime who have helped me to appreciate 'the great Francis Libermann' (Pope John Paul II).

Myles L. Fay CSSp  
Enugu, Nigeria,  
2 February 1993

141st Anniversary of Francis Libermann's Death.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *Prologue*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. In principio erat Verbum, et<br>Verbum erat apud Deum, et<br>Deus erat Verbum. | 1. <i>In the beginning was the<br/>Word, and the Word was<br/>with God, and the Word<br/>was God.</i> |
|---|---|

From the origin of time the Word was from the beginning of all existence, and so the Word was not created. 'Was' means eternity; it does not designate any particular age but proclaims a prolonged and indefinite existence. Now, since there is question here of the origin of time, this 'was' means eternity. When time began, the Word already was, therefore from all eternity; the beginning of time found the Word already existing. 'And the Word was in God', that is to say, in his Father. Firstly, it was not a separate existence but participated in the Father's divinity. Secondly, it also means that the substance of the Word was the substance of the Father himself. 'He was with or in the Father'. His substance, his nature and all his infinite perfections were all contained in the infinite substance of his Father. 'And the Word was God'. First, the evangelist finally expresses the great truth: the Word who lives that way in the Father is not a foreign substance which the Father has attracted into himself, but the Word was God. From all eternity, the Word has in himself the Father's whole nature and very substance. Second, it also shows that not only is the Word in the Father, but that the Father is in the Word according to his whole nature, his whole substance and all his perfections. The Word is nothing other than the substantial image and positive representation of the whole infinite and divine being of his Father. 'And the Word was God'. He

does not say: 'and the Word was the Father' but 'and the Word was God', to show that the Word possesses in himself all his Father's divine nature constituting his whole being. He is not the Father, for he has not fatherhood but divinity. Neither does St John say: 'and God was in the Word', for this would mean something independent of his Father, that the divinity of his Father resides in him, but he says: 'and the Word was God', which means that the whole existence and infinite being of the Word is nothing else than the substantial, eternal and infinite representation of the divinity of his Father. By these two sentences: 'and the Word was with God', St John seems to represent the eternal, substantial and infinite relation of the Father with the Word and of the Word with the Father. 'And the Word was in God' means: behold the Word in the Father. 'And the Word was God' means: behold the Father in the Word. Now from this twofold relationship there proceeds substantially, eternally and infinitely the Holy Spirit.

2. Hoc erat in principio  
apud Deum.

2. *He was in the beginning  
with God;*

If 'this' refers to the Word of whom he has already spoken it means: this is the Word conceived as I have said, who already was from all eternity in God. If 'this' means: there you have what was already in God from the beginning, the verse could still be like a confirmation and special indication of the divine, eternal, substantial relationship of the two divine Persons, and it would particularly indicate the essential and substantial principle of the procession of the Holy Spirit.

3. Omnia per ipsum facta sunt,  
et sine ipso factum est nihil  
quod factum est.

3. *all things were made  
through him, and without  
him was not anything  
made that was made.*



In the Creed of Constantinople we say, speaking of the Father: 'maker of heaven and earth', and speaking of the Son we say these words: 'through whom all things were made'. Creation is attributed to the Father: because all acts of power are attributed to this adorable Person, because of the infinite power with which the Father from all eternity generates a Son who is as infinite and great as himself. The incomprehensible eternal generation is what distinguishes the Father from the other two sacred Persons. It is this omnipotent generation that constitutes the fatherhood, and thus omnipotence is attributed to the fatherhood.

Although the other two adorable Persons are omnipotent like the Father, nevertheless the eternal and infinite reality of their personality is not one of power, but in the Son it is one of light or wisdom as he conceives in himself all the divinity of his Father. And in the Holy Spirit, it is love as proceeding from the eternal, infinite and substantial embrace of the Father with the Son and of the Son with the Father.

From this, it follows that omnipotence is not the attribute of the Word's personality, nor of the Holy Spirit's, but of the Father alone. And as the creation of the world is an act of power, we say of the Father that he is the Creator, and we do not say it of the Word or the Holy Spirit, because the creation of the world is an image of the eternal generation of the Son. The Son is a substantial and perfect image of the Father, the creature is a finite and imperfect one; it is nevertheless to the Father alone that we must attribute omnipotence. When St John says about the Word: 'all things were made through him', he attributes cooperation to the Word in creation.

The Holy Spirit cooperated as much as the Word and the Father. But St John speaks here of cooperation as a personal attribute of the Word. The reason for this personal attribution is this, that the Father willed to create in the world his perfect and finite image. On this creature he spread a ray from his substantial image, which is the Word. So the whole creature is only a small effusion of a ray of the infinite perfection of the Word, who is the perfect image of

the Father. This is why Scripture says in Genesis regarding each moment of creation: 'God saw that it was good'. That is to say, in creatures the Father beheld the image of his Son, with whom alone he was completely pleased. This helps us to understand the words of St John and the Creed, which say that everything was created by the Word, and yet it is the Father whom we call Creator. We read similarly in Genesis: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth'. The Hebrew text means 'through the principle' as well as 'in the principle or beginning'. According to what we have said, both meanings are true; and 'principle' means the Word, the principle existing before creation and a principle from which a ray emanated to cover the void, so to speak, with its being. The Chaldaic paraphrase translates 'in the beginning' as 'in wisdom' and it is especially in this sense that we can clearly explain 'all things were made through him'.

Power is the first creative principle, which is why creation is attributed to the Father. But in application and execution the act of power is united with wisdom so as to coordinate its operations and render them worthy of the divinity. 'And he saw they were very good.' In that sense everything was done through the Word.

There is another way of explaining these words. The Word is the infinite expression of the Father's essence and divine life. Hence it was through the Word that the Father had to produce the creature, in which his divine will expresses his being and life in a finite way. The being of a creature is a participation in the divine being and its life is a communion in divine life. Just as every creature, in itself and in its way of being, is and can only be an emanation from the divinity, so the source of emanation of every creature is said to be the Father as regards what it is in itself. It is attributed to the Word in so far as it is the full expression of the Father's being and life.

'And without him was not anything made that was made.' By the preceding phrases the apostle says that everything was done by the Word: all things, that is, every creature which the Father's power produced was produced through his Word, as we have just

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explained. It would seem that this latter statement says less than the former. For, to say that everything has been made through the Word signifies that there was a positive and direct cooperation whereas to say that nothing was made without him expresses any sort of cooperation, even a negative one.

However, we should remember that the words which express operations in the divinity express an absolute meaning, in contrast to words that express human actions. To say that the Father did nothing without the Word means that everything was done through him, since a passive state or an indirect cooperation is impossible in God. It follows that the second part of the sentence is merely a confirmation and complement of the first part. Moreover, it is clearly shown by the conjunction 'and'. By this confirmation or rather complement added to the first thought, the evangelist shows the absolute unity of the divine nature and substance of the Father and the Son.

So the first part of the verse expresses the special attribution of the Word and the second expresses the perfect and necessary unity of essence. Of all that was made (by the Father), nothing was made without him (the Word). The repetition of the phrase 'which was made' brings out the unity of the work; the Father's omnipotence can do nothing without his Word; whatever he has done he has done with the Word, through their unity of nature.

Here one might ask: 'If everything that was done was done with the Word, how then account for the existence of evil, of sin? Evil exists, therefore it is created; nevertheless it would be a horrible blasphemy to suppose that the Father created it, willed it. If evil has not been created, how can people commit evil, how does it exist on earth and in eternity?'

All that God created is good, as the text of Genesis we quoted above affirmed. From all eternity he thought of all creation, which through his eternal wisdom is good as a whole and in its details. And through this wisdom he carried out in time what he had conceived from all eternity. And creation was as good in the making as in the thinking; it was good in itself, it was good in its



coordination and in the combination of all its aspects.

When God made the rational creature he favoured it with a gift which was good and excellent, which completed the perfection of its being. This was the gift of freedom. The abuse of this gift is the one and only source of the evil introduced into the world. (Since this first abuse every good thing can be abused.) The rational creature, the most perfect of all, received the most perfect gifts. It was formed in the image and likeness of God, that it might be able to receive the fullness of his communications. By these it was to live and subsist by the divine life which the evangelist calls light, because that life is a luminous reflection of the divinity penetrating and transfixing the intellectual soul, allowing it to see, conceive and understand God living in it.

This it does, first of all, in the present life 'through a mirror' (1 Cor 13:12) because the human intelligent soul is not disengaged from matter and is still in a condition of trial. In glory it will be in a condition of perfection and reality because everything belonging to human nature will then be spiritualised, and because the intelligent soul will have attained the final end and purpose which the Creator intended.

We must keep in mind that the life of God, which is called light in the rational creature, resides not only in intelligence (or thought) but in the intelligent creature as a whole; it operates in all its faculties, vivifying them all simultaneously. The soul resembles God. As in God there is a Trinity of persons, so in the soul there is a trinity of faculties. But also as in God there is an absolute unity in nature so that all the operations are in common, so the soul is one and indivisible in its nature, in such a way that no one of its faculties can receive an impression or produce an operation without the participation of all. It follows that when God gives his life to the rational creature this life, which is light, must enlighten all the faculties or exist in none of them; it cannot vivify without giving the same degree of life to all.

God desired to form a perfect image of his being. For this purpose he had to illumine it with his divine life, and so he made it depend

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continuously on his communications. Hence the intellectual soul does not possess life in itself nor draw it from itself; it possesses only faculties, powers, which God desired to fill and move. The soul has the faculty of sight, feeling, willing. And God communicates light to the intellect so that it may see, and that light becomes feeling in the senses and choice in the will. And so, one sole divine operation by which God communicates his life to the soul, one sole spark of his immense divine life or light which he casts into it, brings into that soul a threefold impulse; one single impulse which he gives it becomes a threefold operation of the soul; or rather, the impulse or the unique operation of the soul acts as a threefold image of the divine persons existing in the soul. It is thus that the soul, of itself an empty vessel by the nature of its creation, has life only through God.

This life or light exists in two ways; the first is the natural life of the soul, the second is the life of grace. The natural life of the soul consists in the exercise of its intellectual faculties by the impressions these faculties receive and by their operations. In it we consider, first, the mechanism of the intellectual movement; this is the play of the capacities which have been given to the soul by the Creator so that they can be affected by any kind of impression and, following that impression, can be put in motion by the action of the will. Properly speaking, this play of the intellectual mechanism is not the (divine) life which is light. It is the powerful activity given to the soul by the Creator, whose movement has its principle in the extreme hunger for that life which the faculties of the soul do not possess in themselves but seek with avidity. This avid desire has its roots in the impetus given to it by the Creator towards the object which must communicate life to it.

Second, this life consists first in the impression which is made on the threefold power of the soul by the object which enlivens it; and second, it consists in the activity of the soul, by which it uses, appropriates and expresses the object which is impressed on it.

The elements of this life of the soul, its whole intellectual

mechanism, the faculty of sight, of feeling and of willing, are a communication of God's way of being; and the activity by which the soul brings these elements into play to assimilate the object it perceives is a reflection of divine power. This twofold participation in the divine being is inherent in the existence of rational being and could not be taken away from it without annihilating it.

The object which must vivify the intellectual soul is not and cannot be anything other than God alone, for the simple reason that the soul, since it has not life in its faculties, can find it only where that life actually is. Now all life exists only in God. Hence it is from God alone that it must get it. In the whole of nature the intelligent soul finds this life, because there it finds God; but also it is God alone it must find in nature in order to draw this life from it.

4. In ipso vita erat, et vita  
erat lux hominum.

4. *In him was life, and the  
life was the light of men.*

God alone has life in himself by essence; all that is outside of God is essentially dead. This life resides wholly in the Word as well as in the Father, and in the Holy Spirit as well as in the Father and the Son. But the evangelist is speaking here of this life relative to its communication to creatures; and he says that this life, which creatures have received, was the Word in its entirety. The life of the Father is in the Son and through the Son it was communicated to creatures.

There are several kinds of life: the life of inanimate creatures, the life of animate creatures, the life of intellectual creatures, the supernatural life in creatures that are enlivened by grace, and the life of God himself, communicated to creatures in glory. All these different kinds of life reside essentially in the Word, and from him they come to creatures. This fullness of life was in the Word from all eternity and before creation. He himself was essentially life: 'in him was life'. And it is from him that every creature receives at its



creation the life that is proper to it.

The life of those endowed with intelligence St John calls light, whether it be the natural life of intelligence or supernatural life. That is why he adds that this life of the Word was the light of creatures in the time of their innocence: 'and the life was the light of men'. This life consisted in lucidity of mind and rectitude of heart, together with all the qualities that go with these. When sin took hold of humans, the life they received from the Word nevertheless remained in them. Even their intellects still received natural life, but it was no longer light because sin had spoilt everything.

5. Et lux in tenebris lucet,  
et tenebrae eam non  
comprehenderunt.

5. *The light shines in the  
darkness, and the darkness  
has not overcome it.*

According to the previous verse, the most perfect of all the different lives is called light. So the evangelist takes up the same word, light, which means light par excellence, essential light, meaning life par excellence, essential divine life; and by this he designates the Word. This life then came to shine amid the darkness, to enlighten humans once more and give them back the life they once had. Human beings having lost that life which the Word of God had communicated to them in creation, it was in accord with the eternal plan of divine goodness that the Word alone should become incarnate. He appeared among people to communicate once more in a new creation what he had communicated to them before and they had unfortunately lost. This might help us to understand why it was the second divine Person alone who became incarnate and not another.

So the light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it. It is impossible for light and darkness to dwell together. As soon as light penetrates, darkness ceases to exist, and if darkness does exist it means that light has not penetrated there. So it is also with the darkness of the soul, which here means the

absence of the light or of divine life. The Word appeared among human beings filled with darkness, and he appeared as a dazzling light. But those who were in darkness and who wanted to preserve darkness were unable to receive the divine light of the Word, which can only replace darkness but never dwell with it. That is why people who were in darkness did not seize, embrace or comprehend this light.

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| 6. | Fuit homo missus a Deo, cui<br>nomen (erat) Joannes. | 6. | <i>There was a man sent<br/>from God, whose name<br/>was John.</i> |
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The name John means 'mercy'. This name was given by God to show forth the incomprehensible greatness of God's mercy to people. The eternal light appeared in the midst of darkness in virtue of a goodness beyond explaining or understanding. Human beings living in darkness rejected unrecognised the great light which was present among them, because they had greater love for their horrible darkness than for the brilliant light. Love for their darkness made them unaware of the light. The Father might have crushed them in his justice and anger; but not at all. Out of consideration for the extreme plight of these people of darkness, he sent them John, the man of mercy. As they could not approach the light because of their darkness, which that divine light never suffers in its presence, God wanted them nevertheless to come to know that the light was in their midst, through John's testimony.

John was not the light, but he was sent to make the light known, and to draw people to it away from darkness. John could be seen and recognised more easily for what he was by these people of darkness than the light itself.

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| 7. Hic venit in testimonium,<br>ut testimonium perhiberet<br>de lumine, ut omnes crederent<br>per illum. | 7. <i>He came for testimony,<br/>to bear witness to the<br/>light, so that all might<br/>believe through him.</i> |
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John's whole vocation, his whole mission, consisted only in this testimony he had to render to the light. That is why as long as the light remained hidden in Nazareth John also remained hidden in the desert; he had no business among people. But as soon as the time drew near, John appeared to smooth the paths and prepare and dispose the people, so that when the light came to be manifested John could show him to all of them and say: 'Behold the light; behold the Lamb of God'. And once this testimony had been given John would become unneeded again by the world; he would receive his recompense and leave.

So John was only a witness. He was placed between the Old and New Testaments to show the one whose coming had been foretold by the prophets, so that those of his people who were in darkness might see, understand and believe. And just as before John all the members of the Jewish people had to believe through the prophets, so when the light came all had to believe only through John. Thus apostles who were closest to our Lord began to believe through John. It was a great and wonderful predestination for John the Baptist that the Jewish people should come to the light only through him; he was like a bridge over which people crossed from the Old to the New Testament.

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| 8. Non erat ille lux, sed ut<br>testimonium perhiberet de<br>lumine. | 8. <i>He was not the light, but<br/>came to bear witness to<br/>the light.</i> |
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Nevertheless, although he had received so great a power to lead everybody thus by himself to the light, he was not the light. He had no light in himself of himself; he was in the light, he received it from the great light which he showed to others. But he himself was



not the light; he had come only to give testimony to the light. He was only a servant who did not work for himself, but for him who sent him.

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| <p>9. Erat lux vera, quae illuminat<br/>omnem hominem venientem<br/>in hunc mundum.</p> | <p>9. <i>The true light that<br/>enlightens every man was<br/>coming into the world.</i></p> |
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This light which shone in the midst of darkness, and for which John's testimony was needed in order that people might recognise it as the true light, the light of the Father, divinity itself — this enlightens everyone who comes into this world. But none received it without John's testimony, and even with this testimony, few received it. He (the Word) enlightens all who come into this world. This means he gives them natural light. In this natural light there is an admixture of darkness introduced by sin, which darkens the light to an astonishing degree although some light always remains. The phrase 'that enlightens' could also mean that he wants to enlighten, or aims at enlightening, everyone, that he shines light on everyone but most people refuse it. To divine light they prefer sin, which is darkness, and in this sense the light signifies grace, the supernatural light or life.

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| <p>10. In mundo erat, et mundus<br/>per ipsum factus est, et<br/>mundus eum non cognovit.</p> | <p>10. <i>He was in the world, and<br/>the world was made<br/>through him, yet the<br/>world knew him not.</i></p> |
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This manifestation of eternal light was not made 'through a mirror' (cf. 1 Cor 13:12) as for the prophets. It was not through an image, a representation, or a ray of divine light, which appeared in order to shed great brightness, but through light itself, substantially present in the world. 'World' here means earth in general. Divine light appeared among men to enlighten them, but it is astonishing that this world which was made by him, which is nothing and has

nothing that has not been imparted to it by the divine light, this world nevertheless did not recognise him who made it.

Here 'world' means the people who love the world and the things that are in the world, who are busy about the world, that is, the earth and things of the earth, in which they find their satisfaction. All these failed to recognise the great light which appeared among them.

This always happens to those whose mind is busy about the earth and things of the earth; these things they esteem, their heart loves them. They will be closed to the light and fail to recognise it. Divine graces do not penetrate them, or are rejected; they remain in obscurity, a sort of stupor about everything that comes from the divine light. St Paul says as much: the worldly person does not perceive the things of the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:14). The carnal man means for St Paul what St John calls the world.

11. In propria venit, et sui  
eum non receperunt.

11. *He came to his own  
home, and his own  
people received him not.*

The preceding verse was concerned with understanding; the blind world did not recognise him, although it should have and although it had nothing in itself that did not come from him. The present verse is concerned with the will: the world has not received him. What frightful ingratitude and injustice! The Word of God comes to visit his own property — all that we are and all that we have is his possession; nevertheless the world did not want to receive its great and sovereign Master to its own undoing. How happy the world would have been if the sovereign Lord had compelled his slave to receive him into his own property! But he did not judge it opportune to compel the world. So the unfortunate world was deprived of an immense blessing, and that through its malice and ill-will.

Lord Jesus, come into me; I, too, am your slave and your property. I do not want to be like the world; I want, I desire ardently,

to receive you. And if I had the misfortune to resist you, command, force me; use your power and authority as a Master! ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ (Rev 22: 20)!

The words ‘he came to his own’ could be understood of the Jewish people, for they had been chosen from among all the other peoples to be the people of God. But this unfortunate people, filled with the spirit of the world, failed to recognise him and refused to receive him.

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| <p>12. Quotquot autem receperunt<br/>eum, dedit eis potestatem<br/>filios Dei fieri, his, qui<br/>credunt in nomine ejus.</p> | <p>12. <i>But to all who received<br/>him, who believed in his<br/>name, he gave power to<br/>become children of God;</i></p> |
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Among those to whom the adorable light manifested itself, there were some who received it. The reception the evangelist speaks of was the beginning of faith, and such beginnings were manifest in several Jews. Their intellect became aware of the divine light and their will was even moved and became inclined toward this divine light; they believed that he was the Son of God but did not yet commit themselves to him because of awkward obstacles in their minds and great weakness in their wills.

All those who received him that way, being faithful to this first light, received the power to become children of God; through further illumination they were led to have a firm faith that clung willingly to the adorable light in which they believed. Being faithful to this second light, they became children of God. By the first reception of light they were not yet children of God but only received the power — ‘he gave them the power’ — to become such children, namely, through fidelity to this second grace. Having faith they became children of God. ‘To all who believed’ means that all who believe have first received the power to become children of God, and afterwards actually become so.

What the evangelist declares here, namely, that we become children of God, is a wonderful thing. By the first blessing of



creation we owe to the divine Word the quality of being servants of his Father, because being a creature always brings with it the attribute of nothingness and can have a claim to nothing but servitude. Since by our sin we had abandoned the service of God, then the Word, to repair his original work, came on earth, mingled among us and became united to our nature. And to all who would unite themselves to him through genuine faith he gave a share in the divine sonship.

13. Qui non ex sanguinibus,  
neque ex voluntate carnis,  
neque ex voluntate viri,  
sed ex Deo nati sunt.

13. *who were born, not of  
blood, nor of the will of  
the flesh nor of the  
will of man, but of God.*

In this verse the evangelist lets us know that the seed and principle of this divine sonship is not in ourselves, nor is it by our own powers that we come to it but by the divine power of the Word. He comes to live in those who cling to him by faith, to animate them, vivify them, and communicate to them the reality of being children of God, for sonship is proper to him. And we owe it to this life and divine communication alone that we are children of God. In order to understand this verse correctly we must realise there are three wills in us. The first is not a will properly so called; we mean the instincts or animal appetites. These instincts or appetites are found even in beasts, as principles from which all their actions spring. It is the first movement of the flesh towards an object. The second will is the delectation of the senses, which pursue the object towards which the instincts tend. We might more readily call these 'will'. It is the will of the senses or of the flesh. Finally, the third is the true will of the soul or of reason, which pursues its object through knowledge of causes. In saying 'by blood', the evangelist refers to the first will and he says that the life of God in us which constitutes divine filiation — the birth we have from God and in God — does not originate in the instincts, for these

have only an animal life. Neither does it originate in the will of the senses nor of the flesh, for these can have only a life of the flesh and get satisfaction from creatures alone. It does not even come from the will of man, that is, from reason, which engages in intellectual life by its own powers and through examination of causes, for this is a human life, whereas the life which produces divine filiation must of necessity be supernatural and divine.

But what then is the principle which begets us for divine life? It is the divine life we obtain through the Word: 'who are born of God'. It follows that every time our soul acts by a natural principle, good as it may be, its action is not an action of a child of God, but the more closely it is united with our Lord, subject to and dependent on his inspiration, the more childlike in the divine sense will it be.

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| 14. Et Verbum caro factum est,<br>et habitavit in nobis; et<br>vidimus gloriam ejus, gloriam<br>quasi unigeniti a Patre, plenum<br>gratiae et veritatis. | 14. <i>And the Word became<br/>flesh and dwelt among us,<br/>full of grace and truth; we<br/>have beheld his glory,<br/>glory as of the only Son<br/>from the Father.</i> |
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So far we have not seen how the Word or the eternal light of the Father manifested itself. The evangelist states it here: 'And the Word became flesh'. Humankind had lost everything by sin and become strangers to God, even enemies. The Son of God, desiring to re-establish his first work in the most perfect way, even desired to give us his status of Son of God. It must be noted that this divine childhood is adoptive, although much stronger than the adoption we find among people. For this adoption among people does not change facts; it is only a representation of something. The only reality in our legal adoption is what results from human law; there is no intrinsic change. On the contrary, in our supernatural adoption as children of God a true filiation is established; there is an efficacious

participation in our Lord's sonship.

How did he accomplish this? By becoming incarnate. Our nature had become estranged from his Father. The Son came and united our poor nature hypostatically to himself, taking a body and soul. This saintly soul and perfect body, which constituted a complete human nature, thus united with the Son of God shares most perfectly the status of Jesus Christ the Son of God. His sacred and adorable humanity is established at the head of all those whom it draws to itself and who cling to it by faith. This adherence is still more perfect in heaven. Through it all the members of Christ are united both to the sacred humanity and the divine Word. Thus united with our Lord Jesus Christ, they become children of God. So our Lord by his incarnation causes all those who believe in his name to be born of God.

This goes to show that we are not children of God by nature, for we are so only because Jesus Christ, who is the natural and only Son of his Father, drew us to himself by grace. But we also see that there is more reality here than in ordinary adoption. This St John says in one of his letters: 'that we might be called sons of God, and that is what we are' (1 Jn 3:1). Not only do we have the name of children of God — a thing which exists in human adoption — but we are truly so by divine grace.

But why did the Word take flesh, become united to it? First in order to overcome sin in its principal dwelling-place by conquering it later by his cross. By this means he made us masters over our sinful flesh for, if he had not become incarnate and had only united himself to the soul, we could not have received those great graces which enable us to control the flesh. Second, the flesh must also participate in divine sonship after the Resurrection. Hence it had to be that we should become incarnate by an incomprehensible effect of his divine goodness to us, which transcends all that the human mind can conceive.

Why did he, become incarnate, purify our flesh only after the resurrection? Why did he not purify by his divine incarnation the flesh of those already in this world who believed in him — as he had purified their souls? This is a mystery, and assuredly an effect of his

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great love for us. One reason is that he wanted to leave us to struggle and therefore triumph spiritually more frequently and thereby strengthen our faith more and more. But this does not seem to me to explain it adequately.

St John says, 'the Word became (was made) flesh', to show the extraordinary perfection of the union of Word with flesh, the most perfect of all possible unions between Creator and creature. Why does he say, 'was made' (became) since the Word is consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father, and hence uncreated, and the word 'made' cannot be applied to him? He calls the divine operation which formed this admirable union 'made' because it is created, since it was carried out in our Lord's most holy flesh. This expression is almost synonymous with St Paul's: 'He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave' (Phil 2:7). A slave: this is said about the human nature and especially about the flesh, which is the dwelling-place of sin in humans, and hence is in a state of utter slavery.

There is another reason St John says: 'And the Word was made flesh': it is to show that the Word made himself visible even to bodily eyes. And why, having spoken of the Son of God who appeared on earth under the name of 'light', does the evangelist at the end repeat 'Word'? It is because he had begun to make us see the inconceivable greatness of the Son of God in his eternal generation under the name of 'Word'. This is most suitable to express eternal generation and does so almost literally. St John then used the term 'light' to express the Son of God's manifestation to human beings because that operation is expressed better by the word 'light'. But when he wants to show the incomprehensible lowliness of the Son of God who became flesh, the holy Spirit makes him choose once more the term 'Word', so that he may bring back our minds to the impenetrable grandeur of the Son of God living in the bosom of his Father in a manner that can hardly be described, and then plunge them again into the depths of his self-emptying. In this way St John placed the two extremes side by side, both of which are beyond the understanding of creatures. This helps us to see God's enormous love for us, who are so poor, wretched, and unworthy even of his attention.

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O Love, incomprehensible love of my God, of my Jesus! How can I love you as you love me? I must remain in my nothingness and poverty face to face with your adorable love; for, my well-beloved Love, you are too great for me to think of doing anything for you. At least, most adorable Love, do with me and in me everything that is in harmony with your good pleasure: 'Come, Lord Jesus, come and live in your most wretched servant'.

There is still another reason why St John says 'Word'. The Incarnation and birth of the Son of God are a perfect image of his eternal generation and of the procession of the Holy Spirit which results. 'And (he) dwelt among us'. He who fills the heavens and earth and whose majesty and glory blaze in the whole universe has come to dwell among humans by means of his union with the flesh. He dwelt among us, adopting the customs of an ordinary life and submitting to all the ordinary weaknesses of the flesh — sin, however, excepted and most of the consequences of sin, such as sicknesses and defects of soul and body.

The word 'dwell' means to remain and live in the midst of us, so that we see him with the very eyes of our bodies as he manifests himself through his adorable flesh; it can also simply mean 'in us' for the word of God, having thus dwelt in human flesh, has also dwelt in us. Indeed the whole of humanity makes up only one body and our Lord is our head; the Word of God, having dwelt in the head, has also dwelt in the members. In this way the evangelist appropriates to himself our Lord's flesh and takes it as his own.

'We have beheld his glory'. The glory of the Word was diffused and expressed in the sacred humanity so that, eternally, a reflection of the glory of the Word came through in our Lord's style of living and his actions. All his features and everything in his external appearance manifested something of the divine in him, 'as of the only Son from the Father', which touched even those who had not faith and enthused his faithful disciples.

We may also say that the glory seen by the disciples manifested the Father's power through the miracles and other powerful acts performed by the Lord, which showed him not so much as God's

messenger but as the only Son. It could also mean the glory which the three disciples saw during the transfiguration, when the voice from heaven was heard to say: 'This is my Son', and so on (Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35). 'Full of grace and truth'; the divine Word showed himself in the sacred humanity by the grace and divine beauty which he lavished on it, on its words and actions. He thus drew to himself the love of those who were pure of heart, like our evangelist.

The beauty and grace that is found in humans, even when supernatural and a product of divine grace, is only an image or ray of divine beauty. Nevertheless, how strongly it attracts and charms hearts, inspiring calm sentiments of piety and love of God! Such was the beauty and grace of the blessed Virgin, who was beyond compare. But in our Lord this grace, this beauty, was not a figure but the truth. The divine Word in his infinite beauty appeared in him. What must have been the delight of those who beheld him with faith!

Here is another meaning. 'Full of grace': the whole treasure of divine grace, which was to be poured out on all the elect from the beginning to the end of time and for all eternity, was contained in our Lord's person. The evangelist says 'full' to show that all his mysteries, all his actions, all his interior and exterior movements, his outlook, the very thought of him — all these exuded, and still produce, graces for those who know how to profit by them.

'And truth'. Whatever is perfect is true and whatever is imperfect is false, or at least is not true, since everything in us ought to be an image of God, and everything not an image of God is not the truth. Even if we express the Father's image in words used to name the perfections the Son of God has placed in us, these signify only half a truth, an imperfect truth, a representation, a shadow of the real truth, which is in God. The Word of God, however, contains God's perfections in himself in all their truth; we find not a figure or image but the substantial truth. This is why John says: 'full of...truth'. It is the full, entire and substantial representation of all the Father's divine perfections.

He continues: 'he dwelt among us...full of grace and truth'. This means he dwelt among us manifesting this grace and truth brilliantly;



he showed us what these gifts were like. He always wants to pour them out on us, if we believe in him. We might also explain the word 'truth' with reference to the law of Moses, which held until the Messiah came. That was not a law of grace; it was a dreadful law, intended to crush sinners and did not give grace. Neither did it express the truth except as an image of the Word who was to become incarnate and give us a law of grace. When the Word came upon earth he came full of grace, as the law foretold, and full of truth, no longer in figure but in reality. This latter explanation makes best sense of the text.

15. Joannes testimonium  
perhibet de ipso, et clamat  
dicens: Hic erat, quem  
dixi: Qui post me venturus est,  
ante me factus est: prior  
me erat.

15. (*John bore witness to  
him, and cried "This was  
he of whom I said, 'He  
who comes after me  
ranks before me, for he  
was before me. ' "*)

John received his mission for the sole purpose of giving testimony to the Incarnate Word. He was faithful to God and zealously obeyed him. 'He cried': this testimony was so continuous and striking that the evangelist thought he was still hearing John at least sixty years later. He does not say 'he bore' but 'he bears witness'. He still seems to hear the zealous precursor actually crying out. (Fr Libermann's comment is on the Latin text which gives the present tense: 'he bears witness'. Tr)

We could also say that John's witness continues to exist and that John the Baptist cries out to all peoples through the voice of the apostles who reported his words. He cries out to all peoples of the earth by the preaching of the Gospel. If we accept this meaning, we can understand why he says: 'He was (before me)' and not 'is'. In the first sense, we can say that he was speaking of our Lord after our Lord had left him to go and preach himself. St John the Baptist reminded the people of the previous testimony he had given before his Master's manifestation, and he says: 'This is he of whom I said; "After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me"' (Jn 1:31). The word 'made (flesh)',

if used here would be wrong and would mean to have existence, referring to the divine nature of the Word.

The text can be explained in another way: 'He who, according to God's designs and will, must come after me and fulfil the things I am saying about him — he, according to the same designs and divine intentions, was made before me'. (This does not mean that the sacred humanity of our Lord had been created before St John, because St John was conceived six months before the Word became flesh so that John could be the precursor. From all eternity the Father had decreed the creation of the adorable humanity, to unite it with his Word. There we have the firstborn of every creature, — all the rest is secondary in the Father's designs: 'I, John, have also entered from all eternity into the Father's plans, but in a subordinate way and only for the service of his well-beloved Son, in order to proclaim him'. In other words the Father conceived from all eternity the creation of the sacred humanity of his Son in a primordial and primary way, and he conceived from all eternity the creation of John in a secondary way. This was so 'for he was before me', because he could conceive primordially only his well-beloved Son.

It is also possible to say — and this is more in accord with the text: 'He who comes after me, that man whom you will soon see, was made before me, for although in himself he was made before me, nevertheless he has a life which is no longer his own but that of the Word, which existed before me because it has been for all eternity'. The humanity is hypostatically united to the Word, and his human will received lovingly and follows with docility all the impulses of the Word, to which it is perfectly united.

16. Et de plenitudine ejus nos  
omnes accepimus, et  
gratiam pro gratia.

16. *And from his fullness have we  
all received, grace upon  
grace.*

And all of us who lived under the Old Law and acquired merit before God, it is from his fullness we received. For, even under the Old Law, all that was good and all salvation came from grace, which the fullness

of Jesus Christ poured out before the Incarnation, but more especially on those who have lived since. This is in keeping with what St Paul says, that our ancestors acquired their merits through faith and not by the works of the law. The Incarnate Word must have great graces to distribute not only to those who live in his law of truth but even to those who lived under the Old Law which foreshadowed it.

Being faithful to this first grace — that is if we receive this first grace which is not very substantial — through this first grace received we shall obtain a greater grace, namely, that of the new law. He or she who is unfaithful to the grace that is offered, who would despise it and not truly receive it, in reality refuses it. But the one who is faithful receives it with gratitude by the very fact of being faithful to it. This is why St John says: 'for truly receiving the first grace, the second grace will be granted to us, and that is the law of grace'.

The merit of our actions comes from grace not from ourselves. If we are faithful to that grace in us which already contains the merits of his Son applied to us, we will receive our reward. The whole reward is a further gift of our Lord's merits which we receive for our fidelity, the redoubling of grace, which is granted to us because of our fidelity, is the gift of further grace — and so 'grace upon grace'.

17. Quia lex per Moysen data  
est, gratia et veritas per  
Jesum Christum facta est.

17. *For the law was given  
through Moses; grace  
and truth came through  
Jesus Christ.*

But why have we received all from Jesus Christ? Because the law, which of itself is empty and only a figure, was given to us such as it was by Moses. For it is not God himself who gave the law; God gave it to Moses and Moses gave it to the people. Now Moses could only give what he had received, namely, purely and simply the law. In Moses there were no graces to add to it. Hence Moses gave only the law, that is, he could only give orders to the people on the part of God: 'You will do this; you will avoid that', and then he exhorted them to observe his commands but was unable to help them.



Great is the difference between the term 'given' which refers to powerlessness, and the term 'made' which proclaims power. That law, then, was given by a man who had only received orders, whereas grace and truth were by Jesus Christ. Hence the strength to observe the law and be faithful to God could only come from him. He speaks of grace and truth: both grace for the time of the law which pre-figures (the New Alliance), so as to be faithful, and truth, which is the second grace, was the reward for those who had remained faithful (to the law).

He says: 'was made', (referring to the grace of the New Alliance) because God's graces and gifts are created objects and their creation here is attributed to the Word by the same term as was used above, 'all things were made by him'. 'It is *by* Jesus Christ' he says, 'that grace was made', and not only by the Word; for all graces come from the Word's union with the sacred humanity.

He says 'was made' in the singular, because grace and truth are the same thing. It is grace by the fact that it embellishes the soul to make it acceptable to God; it is truth inasmuch as it establishes the soul fully in the divine perfections and on that account establishes it in the truth. We could also say it is grace in so far as it is given gratuitously and by pure goodness and mercy. It is truth because it is given to fulfil the divine promises made in the Old Testament; hence it is a manifestation of God's truth and veracity. That is why the old law is called a law of promise, and the new law a law of truth. It can be called truth in so far as it is given to each individual (although no promise was made to an individual that he or she would receive this or that grace), because it is the fulfilment of the Father's eternal predestination, who determines from all eternity the graces to be given in time to each person. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ carries out, in the appointed time, this promise or eternal determination of his Father.

18. Deum nemo vidit unquam:  
unigenitus Filius, qui est in  
sinu Patris, ipse enarravit.

18. *No one has ever seen  
God; the only Son, who is  
in the bosom of the Father,  
he has made him  
known.*

Another great difference between the letters and figures of the law of Moses and the grace and truth of the law of grace lies in the knowledge of God; yet in this is eternal life: 'that they know thee, the only true God' (Jn 17:3), and this is the source and principle of all truth. Moses could do no more than give an idea of God in figure; he could offer an imperfect picture, such that those who saw it understood what they could. This was because Moses could not teach what he had not seen himself except 'in a mirror' (1 Cor 13:12) and in figure; on the other hand, the Son of God, who is in his Father's bosom, and who possesses his Father's essence and sees him essentially, could tell us the reality, and he recounted for us, his face fully visible, what we were capable of learning. One could say that Moses did not give grace and truth because he had not got it. He could not have had it, and thus could not give it, until he saw God 'as he is' (1 Jn 3:2). This vision alone gives possession of God.

The only knowledge Moses and the prophets had of God was what the only Son of God, who is in the Father's bosom from all eternity, had given them. Thus all that is of substance and truth in the law and the prophets comes from the Word. Consequently the Word alone is the author of grace and truth. As these graces and this information were accorded to Moses and the prophets only through the virtue and merits of the Incarnate Word, it follows that Jesus Christ alone is the source of every grace and truth given to the saints. He does not give this truth, grace and knowledge as Moses did, only in written words. He engraves them on their souls and enlightens them from within.

## *The Witness of John*

19. Et hoc est testimonium  
Joannis, quando miserunt  
Judaei ab Jerosolymis  
sacerdotes et levitas ad  
eum, ut interrogarent eum:  
Tu quis es?

19. *And this is the testimony  
of John, when the Jews  
sent priests and Levites  
from Jerusalem to ask him,  
“Who are you?”*

Before our Lord appeared John was preaching in the desert and carrying out his office of precursor, to prepare the people for conversion. When the Jews saw such a novel spectacle which they had never seen before even in their former prophets, they suspected this could well be the Messiah. They sent people who knew the law and were capable of judging these matters. These were priests and Levites come to find out who this individual was: ‘Who are you?’ It seems they asked him if he was the Messiah, judging by his reply.

20. Et confessus est, et non  
negavit; et confessus est:  
quia non sum ego Christus.

20. *He confessed, he did not  
deny, but confessed, “I am  
not the Christ.”*

A noteworthy point is that the precursor has no desire to talk about himself. To all the questions about himself he answers in monosyllables or in the fewest possible words; he was afraid of drawing attention to himself when he wished to fix all minds on him for whom he was sent. But as soon as the question is about our Lord he becomes eloquent. And everything he says is always self-effacing, so as to engage others in this principal subject, to show that he is only a way to lead to our Lord. Having reached him, there will be no further thought of the way or means of arriving. He is a model for priests, who ought not draw the attention, esteem and



affection of people to themselves, but should always lead all minds and hearts directly towards the object of all love.

We can also note in his answers that he left himself completely out of account and was in no way seeking esteem; there was no beating around the bush, no detour. He is asked, are you the Messiah? He confesses he is not but does not tell them who he actually is. He replies to the question and then worries not in the least about what people will think of him afterwards because his spirit was wholly absorbed in his Master. He says: 'It is not I who am the Christ'. He wanted to turn their minds away from himself and make them ask: 'Who then is the Christ? Where is he?'

21. Et interrogaverunt eum:  
Quid ergo? Elias es tu?  
Et dixit: Non sum. Propheta  
es tu? Et respondit: Non.

21. *And they asked him,  
"What then. Are you  
Elijah?" He said: "I am  
not". "Are you the  
prophet?" And he  
answered, "No".*

But those who were sent did not share John's sentiments of humility and love for the incarnate Word. They continued their questioning, wanting to find out for certain who he was. Their approach showed what a high opinion they had of John. They thought that at least he was Elijah returned to earth to announce the Messiah. John's humility replied 'No!' although he could have said 'Yes', in the sense of the prophets who had announced him under that name, as having the spirit and power of Elijah. Neither did he want them to think of him as being a prophet. So he replied by a simple 'No', so that those to whom he was speaking could and should believe that he was less than a prophet, although in fact he was the greatest of all the prophets, greater even than Elijah (cf Lk 7:26).

He was telling the truth; he was not a prophet, for the prophets had to announce the Messiah from afar. That was the proper character of the Spirit of prophecy. But John was to announce he was at hand, pointing him out with his finger. His was a unique mission, which he did not share with anyone else, and he alone would enjoy the eternal glory of this in heaven. John seemed to hope that by his short answers he would finally prevent

them from putting personal questions and would direct their attention to the Messiah, his great objective. But not at all.

**22.** Dixerunt ergo ei: Quis es,  
ut responsum demus his, qui  
miserunt nos? Quid dicis de  
teipso?

**22.** *They said to him then:  
“Who are you? Let us have  
an answer for those who  
sent us. What do you say  
about yourself?”*

The messengers wanted something positive to bring back as an answer, and the more John's humility prompted him to turn their attention from himself the more they pressed for an answer, and he finally felt obliged to give one. This he did in a few words, once again manifesting his great humility. But he still directed their attention to his divine Master in order to make them ask a question about the Messiah.

**23.** Ait: Ego vox clamantis in  
deserto: Dirigite viam  
Domini, sicut dixit Isaias  
propheta.

**23.** *He said, “I am the voice  
of one crying in the  
wilderness, ‘Make straight  
the way of the Lord,’ as the  
prophet Isaiah said.”*

Finally St John said his whole mission consisted in crying in the desert and exhorting the people to prepare themselves for the Lord's coming. Throughout his ministry he was only God's voice. He thus showed that, fundamentally, he was nothing. He showed also that he had no power over souls and that all he could do was repeat these words: 'Make straight...' that is, he could tell them to prepare themselves without giving any assistance in that preparation. By these words, even more than by the first answers he gave, St John became self-effacing before the divine Master, focussing all attention on him. It would seem that these messengers of the Jews should finally have asked some questions about the great object of their expectation. But the evangelist in the following verse makes a reflection that explains why they

obstinately persisted in asking questions about John himself.

24. Et qui missi fuerant,  
erant ex Pharisaeis.

24. *Now they had been sent  
from the Pharisees.*

Those who had been sent to John were from the Pharisees. The Pharisees formed a sort of religious body among the Jews. They professed great rigorism in observance of the law, and they led a life that was withdrawn and more perfect according to the law than that of others. They differed from ordinary Jews. This sort of life won the esteem and veneration of the people. This veneration greatly flattered their pride, and they jealously wanted to be the only ones to have it; they took offence at anyone who happened to challenge them. This is why so many questions were asked of St John about what he was, especially the question in the following verse. St John was following a mode of life which was more extraordinary than theirs; he gave very evident proofs of holiness greater than theirs. Large crowds of people flocked to him, all eyes were on him, and they were afraid that gradually he would be esteemed more than they. This was the secret reason for putting so many questions and for not being really interested in learning about the Messiah.

25. Et interrogaverunt eum,  
et dixerunt ei: Quid ergo  
baptizas, si tu non es Christus,  
neque Elias, neque Propheta?

25. *They asked him, "Then  
why are you baptizing, if  
you are neither the Christ,  
nor Elijah, nor the  
prophet?"*

John's baptism was an extraordinary ministry; it greatly moved people and led them to penance, and this gave St John great authority. It was this that offended the poor Pharisees, who wanted to draw everything to themselves. And since this baptism was not provided in the law, they asked John whence he got the authority to baptize, since he was not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet,



and what power there was in his baptism, done without authority?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>26. Respondit eis Joannes, dicens: Ego baptizo in aqua: medius autem vestrum stetit, quem vos nescitis.</p> <p>27. Ipse est, qui post me venturus est, qui ante me factus est: cujus ego non sum dignus ut solvam ejus corrigiam calceamenti.</p> <p>28. Haec in Bethania facta sunt trans Jordanem, ubi erat Joannes baptizans.</p> | <p>26. <i>John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know,</i></p> <p>27. <i>even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."</i></p> <p>28. <i>This took place in Bethany, beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.</i></p> |
|---|---|

St John said: 'My baptism is but a baptism of water. Why do you ask so many questions about my baptism? This baptism has no spiritual power of itself, nor do I give it any power coming from myself. But there is someone who is in your midst, whom you fail to know; all your attention should be fixed on him'. We may presume that he added here what the other evangelists say, and what the present evangelist presupposes later on, namely: 'He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit' (Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16). For by all these words St John wants to show that his baptism is nothing and that he is only preparing the way for the Messiah, who will appear at any moment and give what John's baptism merely prefigured.

So John said: 'You come here into the desert to question me about all this, but the One for whom I have come is in your midst and you fail to know him. It is he who will come after me, the great personage to serve whom I was made. I have come only to be his forerunner, but I am not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals, so great is he and so little am I beside him. Concern yourselves with

him and not with me'.

It is also possible to explain 'to loosen' (RSV: untie) this way: 'My ministry is a very small thing, for it is only a matter of preparing the way for him. And once he comes my services are finished. I am not worthy to serve him in the apostolate'. The expression 'to loosen (untie) the strings of his sandal' means: to ease things for him in his apostolic course, as the lowliest servant does for his master when the latter comes from a journey — he opens his shoes to let him relax.

29. Altera die vidit Joannes  
Jesum venientem ad se, et  
ait: Ecce agnus Dei, ecce  
qui tollit peccatum mundi.

29. *The next day he saw  
Jesus coming toward  
him, and said: "Behold  
the Lamb of God, who  
takes away the sin of the  
world!"*

Up to this point the evangelist has reported John's testimony after our Lord had left him, as also before he came. Now he will speak about the testimony John gave in his presence. When Jesus came towards St John, as soon as the precursor saw him from afar, the indwelling Spirit of God let him recognise him whom he had desired for so long and whom he had announced with so much vigour and respect. Stirred by tender love at seeing so much grace, such gentleness and such great innocence combined in his sacred person, he said: 'Behold the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world'. He calls him 'Lamb' to call attention to his innocence and gentleness and proclaim him as a victim. He calls him 'Lamb of God' because he is an innocent victim pleasing to his Father, entirely devoted to him, coming from him and wholly belonging to him; he also wants to point out that the entire divinity is in him and that therefore he is a divine victim.

'Who takes away the sin of the world': this adorable Lamb is pure and holy; he is a victim only of the sin of the world which he bears on himself and which he removes and takes away by his sacrifice. Although John did not know that our Lord had to be baptised by him,

nevertheless he was inspired to say these things so that people would see that if the divine Messiah received the baptism of penance, it was not because he was a sinner; he had no need of baptism. He desired baptism only because he had taken all the sins of the world on himself; and, having to take them away, it was necessary for the divine Lamb to come himself and receive this baptism so as to give it power and grace for repentance. It was also in order that he might, so to say, consecrate the element which would serve later on in the baptism which *ipso facto* would remit sins. He says 'the sin of the world', to designate original sin, of which all other sins are but the effects, and in which, therefore, all these other sins are contained and are taken away by the divine Lamb.

30. Hic est, de quo dixi: Post me venit vir, qui ante me factus est, quia prior me erat.

30. *This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.'*

31. Et ego nesciebam eum; sed ut manifestetur in Israel, propterea veni ego in aqua baptizans.

31. *I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."*

John the Baptist constantly repeats the same thing to emphasise the Messiah's greatness. And after speaking about him as a victim offered to the Father's glory in a way that would fill the whole world with love, he added these words to inspire due respect and veneration for the Son of God. He came himself to baptize in water only in order to manifest the Son of God in Israel, because it was by this means that the people had begun to dispose themselves through repentance. This would be a disposition required in order to receive the grace of faith and regeneration. Once the penitential spirit was spread among



people, the divine Messiah could come and find an entrance into souls. Moreover, it was on the occasion of his baptism that Jesus revealed himself. And so John explains that his own mission consisted in preparing people by baptism for the Messiah's coming: 'for this I came'. He says he himself did not know him; it means the Messiah was completely unknown until then, and John baptised for the sake of showing his true identity.

He could also say he wanted to show how by the Spirit of God he recognised Jesus at his approach; the divine character of the Lamb of God and the Incarnate Word manifested itself to him initially at that moment. What a rapture of love that outstanding man John the Baptist must have experienced at this happiest moment of his life!

There is another more profound and spiritual explanation: 'I myself did not know him'. This knowledge of our Lord — in the sense so often used in Scripture — means an interior and spiritual knowledge. When our soul is wholly turned to our Lord and is in intimate relation with him, as it sees and considers in contemplation his whole person, his perfections and mysteries, and when it is in contact with him in this intimacy then Jesus also opens himself to such a faithful soul; he receives it in his embrace and communicates himself intimately to it.

In the Old Testament, before our Lord came, this knowledge and contact were very imperfect and unclear. All that was granted to the greatest among the patriarchs and prophets was a distant view, only a foreshadowing. And in place of the satisfaction produced in a soul of New Testament times by the possession of the divine Lamb, the great patriarchs and prophets had hopes, desires and sighs. This is what the divine Master says later on: 'Abraham exulted that he might see my day; he saw it and rejoiced' (Jn 8:56).

Those sighs and longings constantly multiplied as the time approached. To get an idea of this, consider the longings of the great precursor before he was given the supreme joy of actually

seeing the divine Messiah. Before our Lord was manifested, St John was like the earlier patriarchs. Although he was closer to the Messiah, since he had been sanctified by him in his mother's womb, he still saw only from a distance. His obscure knowledge and imperfect contact were produced only by his hope-filled desire. This he expresses in love: 'I did not know him, for my baptism did not receive the graces of sanctification from his hands but the gift of preparing people for his grace. I was working for Jesus, but about his appearance I was ignorant like the others; but now I see him with love: "Behold the Lamb of God".' As soon as our Lord appeared, St John immediately received that contact, those lights, those embraces proper to the New Testament. This was the cause of his delight: he felt, he saw, he knew, he enjoyed in a way proper to an order unheard of before that time.

For St John, in virtue of his office as the precursor, received the grace of both testaments in a high degree of perfection. At least he had the grace of the New Testament at the moment of his contact with our Lord; for all the contacts and external actions of our Lord brought with them interior graces analogous to them: corresponding to external appearance, interior knowledge and so on. Only people in bad dispositions failed to profit by these graces, becoming blinder and more wicked.

Until now we have St John's testimony before our Lord's baptism; in the following verses we shall have his testimony after the baptism.

32. Et testimonium perhibuit  
Joannes, dicens: Quia  
vidi Spiritum descenden-  
tem quasi columbam de  
caelo, et mansit super eum.

32. *And John bore witness, "I  
saw the Spirit descend as a  
dove from heaven, and it  
remained on him.*

33. Et ego nesciebam eum: sed qui misit me baptizare in aqua, ille mihi dixit: Super quem videris Spiritum descendentem, et manentem super eum, hic est qui baptizat in Spiritu Sancto.

33. *I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'*

34. Et ego vidi: et testimonium perhibui quia hic est Filius Dei.

34. *And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

These verses contain John's testimony immediately after the baptism. After our Lord's baptism the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. Not that the sacred humanity received a greater abundance of the Holy Spirit than it had before but the event was to show St John what existed in the Son of man from the first moment of the Incarnation. This is what the visible descent and presence of the divine Spirit meant. It served also to show the effects of the baptism to be instituted by the Son of God of which John's baptism was only a figure. The form of a dove signifies a pure chaste love, innocence, simplicity and mildness, which are its necessary effects.

As the divine promises were being fulfilled and our Lord increased his contacts with St John, in that proportion John must have received clearer graces and lights and must have had deeper experiences. The Son of God must have affected John deeply at the moment of the intimate wonderful contact during the baptism he received at John's hands. What he actually saw became evident in the vision of the dove. These manifestations (of Jesus' divine origin) must have been efficacious, surpassing all that John had received until then. As these contacts and graces increased St John entered into a steadily greater love and must have been filled with an ever greater wonder at what he saw. This is why he repeats 'I



myself did not know him'. The greater the knowledge he acquired the more he came to realise his former lack of knowledge. He knew for a long time about the Son of man coming upon earth and his union with the flesh. It seems the idea of hypostatic union, (of divine with human nature), was new to John, or at best vaguely perceived. All he had of this was an obscure perception, a certain glimmer of light.

When God let him know that his Son would come and baptise in the Holy Spirit, and when he promised he would let John recognise him by the sign of a dove which would descend upon him and remain on him, the saint then saw clearly that the sacred humanity would be intimately related to the divinity. The Holy Spirit would rest upon him, and he would possess all power to dispose of his gifts.

But it was another story when the event actually came to pass. Then our Lord became more open with him, established contact between his own soul and John's, made him grasp, feel, relish the union of the sacred humanity with the Word and his relations with the Holy Spirit, and according to John's capacity for it gave him a share in his grace. Our Lord also let him see what grace he had come to communicate to people: 'He it is who baptizes in the Holy Spirit'. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is... (this sentence was never completed — ed.)

**34.** Et ego vidi...

**34.** *And I have seen...*

We must go somewhat beyond the literal sense of these words in this most extraordinary setting: the Son of God dealing with the greatest among the children of men. John was called to give testimony and make everybody believe in the greatness of the Son of God's mission. 'And I have seen': the Son of God let him see. When we want to have important witnesses for some serious thing of consequence, we must let them see everything to which they have to give testimony. Hence we can justifiably conclude that John saw and pondered the great treasures enfolded in our Lord Jesus Christ, and

also that he penetrated into his divine interior life to consider the wonderful union of the Word with the Son of man, of the Son of God with the Son of David. This is why he says admiringly: 'I have seen him and I have given testimony that he is the Son of God'. He knew this already through revelation; that is certain but he had not seen him. Now that he has seen him, his testimony has a totally different power. And what did he see? He saw the Son of God in that flesh which appears to the eye, and he testified that he is the Son of God.

All this took place immediately after our Lord's baptism. St John says: 'I have given testimony'. He uses the past tense for the present, as is often done in Scripture.

Another explanation: the word 'testimony' in St John has not the ordinary meaning it has in our human affairs in strict usage. What it means in the present text is a strong, lively affirmation, one that is full of faith and love regarding a known truth. This kind of testimony can be given in our hearts and to ourselves, or in the presence of God by acts of faith and charity, or in the presence of others by exhorting them to believe the things we proclaim and cling to them with like sentiments of faith and love. Here the words 'I have given testimony' can refer to the time when St John had the happiness of seeing the things he had been wondering about. He then gave glory to God by acts of loving faith in the Son of God. It is a testimony like St Thomas's, who said: 'My Lord and my God' (Jn 20:28) or like Nathaniel's: 'You are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel' (Jn 1:49).

### *The First Disciples*

35. Altera die, iterum stabat  
Joannes, et ex discipulis  
ejus duo.

35. *The next day again John  
was standing with two of  
his disciples;*

**36.** Et respiciens Jesum  
ambulantem, dixit: Ecce  
Agnus Dei.

**36.** *and he looked at Jesus as  
he walked, and said,  
"Behold, the Lamb of  
God!"*

Having prepared the people for our Lord's coming, and having given testimony to him for whom he had been sent, John now had to decrease little by little and disappear, so that everybody might concentrate on our Lord. This is why he was the first to furnish disciples for him; St Andrew, and the other who could well have been St John the Evangelist who, through modesty, does not name himself.

As our Lord was walking in the neighbourhood, the holy precursor's eyes followed him with contentment and love. And he said in front of his disciples: 'Behold the Lamb of God', desiring to inspire them with the love which filled himself and encourage them to follow the divine Lamb. And indeed he succeeded perfectly in inspiring them with this desire.

**37.** Et audierunt eum duo  
discipuli loquentem, et  
secuti sunt Jesum.

**37.** *The two disciples heard him  
say this, and they  
followed Jesus.*

For immediately they followed Jesus. This shows the good disposition of these disciples, who greatly desired to come closer to the Son of God. It also shows great simplicity of heart and docility of mind. These attitudes disposed them perfectly to receive the faith and all the activity of grace our Lord was carrying out in them. When these three qualities are lacking we rarely see a soul progressing and establishing itself in perfect faith. Then our Lord cannot establish his holy familiarity, for he constantly finds obstacles in the way of his grace.



38. *Conversus autem Jesus, et videns eos sequentes se, dicit eis: Quid quaeritis? Qui dixerunt ei: Rabbi (quod dicitur interpretatum Magister), ubi habitas?*

38. *Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"*

In the whole story of the call of the two disciples, the evangelist shows in what way our Lord calls souls to himself and has them follow the perfection of his divine love. All who have the happiness of belonging to the divine Master will recognise in these three verses their own story, or the story of the goodness, gentleness and love of Jesus for them. For in all of this we see the gentleness and simplicity of the Lamb of God appearing splendidly. The divine Master wants to draw these two disciples to himself and possess them. He makes John say something to touch their hearts, for it is ordinarily his custom to make use of some external means offered by the providence of his Father to produce the first movement. At the same time as he prompts his servant to deliver the first stroke, he touches these two good souls interiorly and shows himself from afar to attract them.

The apostles, thus touched and drawn, were faithful to this grace. Jesus seeing them full of good desires and faithful in following the impulse he gave them, did not leave them running after him. And this is what normally happens. A soul that has been touched by the first grace seeks our Lord with an urgent desire to attract his attention. If it had to wait a long time before obtaining the divine attention, it would become discouraged and go back. But the divine Master does not make those who seek him with fidelity and good desires wait for long. He acts towards them as he did towards the two disciples.

He turned round to show he knew they were following. This kindness of our Lord was already a great grace and must have comforted their hearts. This is what normally happens. Our Lord

makes a soul that seeks him feel that he sees it. He turns to it and this itself is a consolation. After showing them how satisfied he was with their fidelity in following him, and after drawing them by that look of goodness and love which used to touch all hearts, he spoke.

Our Lord's word is usually the last stroke that makes a soul decide for him. This word is so full of consolation and love that the soul immediately desires a relationship of intimacy and familiarity with its well-beloved. He said, 'What are you seeking?' He excited their desire even more by focussing on the object of their desire. They ardently desired to follow him and enjoy his holy presence. He turned towards them and asked what they were in search of, so as to give their desire an opportunity to grow, both in the hope of obtaining what they were seeking and by the external expression of their inward desire. All souls at the beginning receive these interior words which arouse their desire more and more through hope of attaining their goal by repeated acts of this desire.

As usual while our Lord spoke with the two disciples, at the same time his grace worked in their hearts, in harmony with his words and actions. The two disciples experienced the powerful influence of his words. And as they sought only to enjoy and foster the sentiment the Son of God had stimulated in them, they wished to remain for some time with him so as to enjoy it a little longer.

They were not yet at the stage of perfection when, later on, they would leave everything to follow their Master. From time to time they went with him, attaching themselves to him, to see him, listen to him, and enjoy the graces he gave them in abundance. They were like all souls in the beginning, when grace has touched them and our Lord pursues and draws them. They want to enjoy him, and do so at intervals, always glad to return to him.

The disciples did not answer him directly, saying 'Lord, it is you we seek.' But they acted like all people do in this situation; their thoughts were not coherent or regular. The intensity of their feelings aroused their imaginations. In their great joy at knowing they were with the Lamb of God, realising that he was paying attention to them, speaking to them so graciously, and feeling themselves at the same

time inflamed by his divine grace, they believed they possessed already what they were looking for. They thought of nothing else but preserving that happiness for some time and of enjoying it on other occasions. This is the effect of Jesus' divine love when it enters a soul: it makes it insatiable.

This is why the two apostles so preoccupied with this desire, instead of answering put him another question in order to satisfy their desire to know more about him. But Jesus knew better than they what was going on within their hearts; he drew them on.

39. Dicit eis: Venite, et videte.

Venerunt, et viderunt ubi manerent, et apud eum manserunt die illo. Hora autem erat quasi decima.

39. *He said to them, "Come*

*and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.*

40. Erat autem Andreas, frater Simonis Petri, unus ex duobus, qui audierunt a Joanne, et secuti fuerunt eum.

40. *One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.*

Our divine Master's goodness grants all they ask to those who desire his gifts, and more generously than they ask for he knows the desires of hearts better than those who try to articulate them. He could have told the apostles he had no home or he could have indicated it by word of mouth. But no! In friendship he invited them to come and see for themselves. And while talking he drew them on by a strong interior attraction to follow and stay close to him.

This is the invitation he gives to willing souls, especially at the beginning when they are not used to being in his company. By saying 'come' he arouses their desire and produces a strong attraction towards himself; by saying 'see' he arouses their mind and makes it



want to know and see him. Thereby he soon obtains total hold of the will which takes pleasure in him once the soul knows him and determines to live entirely for him and in him. It is then that the soul is established in perfection.

These are three movements in a soul that gives itself wholly to our Lord. All three function in virtue of his grace, which acts on our various powers. The first is that attraction to him, that seeking and desire which carry us along towards him. The second is the application of our mind in order to see and know him and be taken up with him; this movement was still at work in the two disciples. The third comes after these other two, and only when one possesses him: the will enjoys him and commits itself to being entirely, definitively, directed to him alone.

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|---|--|
| 41. Invenit hic primum fratrem suum Simonem, et dicit ei: Invenimus Messiam (quod est interpretatum Christus).                          | 41. <i>He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).</i>  |
| 42. Et adduxit eum ad Jesum. Intuitus autem eum Jesus, dixit: Tu es Simon, filius Jona: tu vocaberis Cephas, quod interpretatur Petrus. | 42. <i>He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).</i> |
| 43. In crastinum voluit exire in Galileam, et invenit Philippum. Et dicit ei Jesus: Sequere me.   | 43. <i>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."</i>  |

St Andrew, as will usually happen to those who have been frequently drawn to our Lord, had at once a burning ardent desire to share his joy with those who were dear to him. He went

at once to find his brother and announce that he had discovered the Messiah. St John the Baptist had made him known to Andrew, who then saw Jesus with his own two eyes, enjoyed his presence and tasted great happiness; his faith was free from doubt and hesitation, and he immediately brought his brother to Jesus so that he too might have the joy of seeing him.

When Simon Peter came, our Lord gave him a special look, a look which signified the special election of this apostle to be the foundation of the Church. Our Lord said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah'. He called him both by his own name and his father's to show that the greatness, the sovereign power with which he will be endowed, is purely a gift from his heavenly Father and that Peter, by his own nature and the right of his ancestors, is weak and lowly, so much so that people would pay no attention to him. But through the divine power invested in him by our Lord, he would be called rock because of the strength and stability he was going to receive. Our Lord said 'you will be called' in the future, because Simon Peter would receive this important gift for the Church only after his Master's Ascension.

44. Erat autem Philippus a  
Bethsaida, civitate  
Andreae et Petri.

44. *Now Philip was from  
Bethsaida, the city of Andrew  
and Peter.*

45. Invenit Philippus Nathanael,  
et dicit ei: Quem scripsit  
Moyses in lege, et prophetae,  
invenimus Jesum, filium  
Joseph, a Nazareth.

45. *Philip found Nathanael  
and said to him, "We have  
found him of whom  
Moses in the law and also  
the prophets wrote, Jesus  
of Nazareth, the son of  
Joseph."*

Philip had the same zeal as Andrew. He went immediately to find his friend Nathanael, whom some believe to be the apostle St Bartholomew, and he proclaimed the Messiah to him. His faith in

the Messiah seems to have been unclear just then; he called him son of Joseph, not yet suspecting that he was Son of God; he saw only a human being, a human Messiah.

46. Et dixit ei Nathanael: A  
Nazareth potest aliquid  
boni esse? Dicit ei Philippus:  
Veni, et vide.

46. *Nathanael said to him,  
"Can anything good come  
out of Nazareth?" Philip  
said to him, "Come and  
see."*

Nathanael's simple heart was totally prejudiced against the inhabitants of Nazareth, because he knew them to be evil, which indeed they were. As for Joseph and Mary, he did not know them; they were leading such a hidden life that they were scarcely known in the country. After all, the inhabitants of Nazareth were so wicked that they were scarcely capable of discerning the great treasure they possessed. The spirit of the flesh is unable to discern what is of the Spirit of God. If Mary and Joseph were to be known for what they were, the people of the country where they were living would have had to broadcast it. But their fellow townspeople did not know them and therefore could not spread their reputation among outsiders.

The words reveal the good Nathanael's heart, his desire to see the Messiah and his esteem and love for that personage. But Philip's words are noteworthy, 'Come and see'. The appearance and presence of our Lord must have been a wondrous sight for good souls. Philip had been but a very short time with the divine Lamb yet he was filled with joy. He was so deeply affected by the visible presence of his Master that he was convinced that nothing else was needed to dissipate Nathanael's prejudice and bring him to believe as he himself now believed. He was not mistaken. Nathanael, in spite of his prejudice, like Philip greatly desired to see the Messiah.



47. Vidit Jesus Nathanael  
venientem ad se, et dicit de eo:  
Ecce verus Israelita  
in quo dolus non est.

47. *Jesus saw Nathanael  
coming to him, and said  
of him, "Behold an Israelite  
indeed, in whom is no  
guile!"*

When Nathanael was close to our Lord, Jesus saw him coming and spoke of him in terms of praise. Our Lord can praise someone to his face, for he can at the same time give the person grace to benefit by that praise and lose nothing by it. And that sort of word, coming from our Lord's mouth, is less a praise than a grace, which increases the virtue of the one he praises. These words of our Lord show the loving-kindness he has for simple souls; simplicity is indeed one of the virtues which draws most grace to a soul.

48. Dicit ei Nathanael: Unde  
me nosti? Respondit Jesus,  
et dixit ei: Priusquam te  
Philippus vocaret, cum  
esses sub ficu, vidi te.

48. *Nathanael said to him,  
"How do you know me?"  
Jesus answered him,  
"Before Philip called you,  
when you were under the  
fig tree, I saw you."*

49. Respondit ei Nathanael, et  
ait: Rabbi, tu es Filius  
Dei, tu es rex Israel.

49. *Nathanael answered him,  
"Rabbi, you are the Son of  
God! You are the King of  
Israel!"*

Nathanael still prejudiced, did not begin with 'Rabbi'. He asked where our Lord could have known him so as to affirm what he did. This goes to show he did not yet believe him to be the Messiah. For Nathanael was single-minded. If he had wished to know whether it was through a prophecy he had spoken thus, he would not have used a roundabout way to ask. But one small word of our Lord's suffices to enlighten a good soul that is sincere and in good faith, as was Nathanael's, whose prejudices came from his goodness and

even from his simplicity. For a docile soul, one word of our Lord's is sufficient to fill it with faith and love. While our Lord spoke to Nathanael, he also imparted a strength that penetrated to the very depths of his soul. And Nathanael did not even bother to find out in what way our Lord knew St Philip had found him under the fig tree. This was enough for him: the sight of our Lord, his divine word and the powerful grace accompanying it; all this enlightened his mind and filled his heart.

The words 'I saw' mean, first of all, the knowledge our Lord has of all things and manifests to Nathanael. Secondly, this view is a look of mercy and friendship. When we are not even thinking of him, our Lord sees us with an eye of goodness and mercy: this is a prevenient (i.e. preparatory) grace, to dispose us to give ourselves to him when the predetermined moment has arrived. That moment had come for Nathanael. Our Lord used means in line with his merciful designs: he sent Philip; he sent for Nathanael; he spoke to him and enlightened him.

50. Respondit Jesus, et dixit  
ei: Quia dixi tibi: Vidi te sub  
ficu, credis: majus his  
videbis.

50. *Jesus answered him,  
"Because I said to you, I  
saw you under the  
fig tree, do you believe?  
You shall see greater  
things than these."*

Our Lord promised him greater graces and lights. He promised that Nathanael would see things which would manifest Jesus' greatness much more while at the same time being interiorly enlightened. These first lights were imperfect, as were all those given to the apostles during our Lord's time on earth; everything Jesus said was addressed to the senses. Nathanael did not say: 'You are the prophet', but 'the Son of God', which proves that an interior light and grace had made him see this on the occasion of our Lord's words, which of themselves could have been said by a prophet.

51. Et dicit ei: Amen, amen dico vobis, videbitis caelum apertum, et angelos Dei ascendentes, et descendentes supra Filium hominis.

51. *And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."*

'You are struck by the earthly things you see the Son of man doing', our Lord says to all his disciples — although addressing Nathanael, 'you will receive great graces and lights by means of these miracles. Here, however, you see a power exercised only upon the things of the earth. But I tell you truthfully that later on, when the Son of man is in his glory, you will see his power in heaven itself. You will see heaven opening before you, and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man, which means being wholly dependent on the Son of man and receiving graces only through him.'

Jesus refers to Jacob's ladder, which signified the sacred humanity. The ascending angels signify the prayers and the adoration they will offer up to God; for it is through the sacred humanity that they, as well as human beings, offer worship. The descending angels signify that all the graces they receive from God, like their missions, will come only through the mediation of the Son of man. Thus the words of the psalmist are fulfilled, 'You have made him a little lower than the angels' (Ps 8: 6). You have given him human nature, which is lower than angelic nature. Nevertheless, you have crowned him with glory and honour, and placed him over the works of your hands (Ps 8:6). The details that follow are images of the elect in heaven, of the good upon earth, of the wicked upon earth, of the angels, and even of all of hell.

The reason our Lord seems to have postponed imparting this knowledge until after the Ascension is, first, because the apostles did not have a true knowledge of our Lord's divine mediation and priesthood, nor of all the communications of graces, nor of his whole power over every creature as a result of



these things, until after the Ascension. The Holy Spirit enlightened them at Pentecost. Secondly, perhaps the graces imparted to the angels only come in virtue of the mystery of the Ascension.

Our Lord's life on earth and the mysteries he enacted seem to be aimed at sanctifying the Church on earth. His life in heaven, on the contrary, seems to be principally for the glorification of the heavenly Church, as St John tells us in *Revelation*: 'The glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb' (Rev 21: 23). All the divine light and glory of the Blessed Trinity is contained in the adorable Lamb and it is the divine Lamb who diffuses it throughout the whole city of God. This is not to say that the Ascension does not contain treasures for the Church on earth, since every perfect gift comes from that event, as we shall see further on: 'I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away' (John 16:7).

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The wedding at Cana*

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| 1. Et die tertia nuptiae<br>factae sunt in Cana<br>Galileae; et erat mater<br>Jesu ibi. | 1. <i>On the third day there was<br/>a marriage at Cana in<br/>Galilee, and the mother of<br/>Jesus was there;</i> |
|---|--|

For the Jews a wedding feast was holy. People took part in it with devotion and everything was done to make the spouses happy. However, it is unlikely that Mary often assisted at weddings, especially without Jesus. She preferred to remain in the joyful embraces of her own spouse, the Holy Spirit, than to be taken up with those external noisy affairs. But the divine Spirit led her and she, being always perfectly docile and submissive to his holy guidance, went unhesitatingly although it did not seem her place.

Perhaps she did not know what God had in mind in leading her there. She may have believed it was to sanctify the newly-weds. In reality it was, first of all, to honour Mary through the first miracle of her Son so that the beginning of his ministry would take place through Mary's intercession; secondly, to show the Church what she may expect from Mary, prefigured by what Mary obtained on that occasion: strength in her struggles, consolation in her pains, and joy in the prosperity Mary constantly obtains for her, for wine is the symbol of strength, joy and consolation; thirdly, to make known from the beginning of the Christian Church, which was then confined to the small number of disciples who were with Jesus and symbolised by the wedding feast of Cana, the all-powerful intercession of Mary, who influenced our Lord to anticipate the moment the Blessed Trinity had determined (for the manifestation of his power — ed.) and work miracles from then on.

2. Vocatus est autem et  
Jesus, et discipuli  
ejus ad nuptias.

2. *Jesus also was invited to the  
marriage, with his  
disciples.*

John's testimony had spread abroad and left a strong impression on many people, the impression that our Lord was an extraordinary man. Since the house was already full of fragrance and heavenly joy, brought by the mother's presence, it was natural to invite also the Son and his disciples.

3. Et deficiente vino, dicit  
Mater Jesu ad eum: Vinum  
non habent.

3. *When the wine failed, the  
mother of Jesus said to  
him, "They have no wine."*

Mary's heart was a vast treasure. Her mouth is the opening to this great treasure through which we can see, as it were, just a small part of it. This mouth sweeter than honey, more precious than gold is not often opened, so we must open our soul to receive each one of her words attentively and give them thorough consideration.

First, at this moment Mary prays to her Son and she prays as his mother. This is something to note particularly. From the time Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord', she no longer prays as a servant but as a mother. Think of Mary's eyes when she looks in all simplicity at her well-beloved Son to make this request, consider her heart and the sentiments welling up in it. She wants two things: her Son's glory to be manifested on this occasion and the welfare and consolation of the guests: two desires or wishes worthy of the perfect love of Mary's heart. Perfect charity seeks to procure even temporal goods, not for their own sake as they are nothing, but for the spiritual consolation of souls. She asks with the love of the Mother of God and with the authority that goes with her dignity as mother. She is 'the all-powerful suppliant'. 'They have no wine', she says.

The second thing to observe is this: Mary's life is a life of silence. All the marvels of her incomprehensible love were enclosed with-



in. When she had to speak, she did it with as few words as possible. Even with her Son she spoke only silently. Jesus' conversation with Mary was not heard by any earthly creature, for it was wholly interior and not understood even by the angels. This conversation was continual; who could conceive the unspeakable communion between Jesus and Mary! But it seems it would be easy to count the external words they spoke. Here Mary was obliged to speak, to manifest what is said in the beginning of the verse, and this she does in three words.

Thirdly, Mary knew our Lord's great precept of prayer: it does not consist in a multiplicity of words (cf Mt 6:7). She says little, but her soul is open to her Son with her usual love.

Fourthly, Mary in three words shows us a wonderful way to pray. She simply lays bare her needs, and in her heart and eyes our Lord clearly sees her desire. This is a perfect manner of praying, of opening the wounds of our hearts before our gentle Master, resting our soul in him after that and entrusting ourselves to his great love and mercy. We then await in loving contemplation the outcome of his tender love.

4. Et dicit ei Jesus: Quid mihi,  
et tibi est, mulier? Nondum  
venit hora mea.

4. *And Jesus said to her, "O  
woman, what have you to  
do with me? My hour has  
not yet come."*

The phrase, 'what is that to me and to thee', as used in Scripture, means a complaint or displeasure or refusal. But it can be used with respect. The woman of Zarephath, after the death of her son, said to Elijah: 'what is it to me and to thee, man of God?' (1 Kg 17:18; tr. from French version). And doubtless she spoke to him with respect. We can accordingly explain this text as follows: the guests, though they had faith, did not consider Jesus as the Son of God, but looked upon him as a man inspired by God, which was the usual thing among those who believed in him while he was on earth. In his behaviour they saw only the man, and believed that he acted

only through obedience and love for his mother, although in fact as regards everything that pertained to his ministry, and during the whole time he exercised it, he no longer had a relationship of obedience towards his mother.

In everything that concerned his private life during his first thirty years he 'was obedient to them' (Lk 2:51), but in his public life he took orders directly from his Father only. He did nothing except in accordance with what had been eternally determined and decreed by his Father for all his actions and for the proper moment and manner in which they were to be carried out. He had said this already in his childhood, when his mother found him in the Temple: 'Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' (Lk 2:49). This was a public ministry. After that he returned to Nazareth 'and was subject to them', because this was his private life. In another place he made the same point clear. When his mother asked for him while he was preaching, he said, 'Who is my mother and my brethren!... For whoever does the will of my Father... is my brother and sister and mother' (Mt 12:48-50).

This shows that in his public ministry our Lord no longer had to keep contact with his mother, but solely with his Father's will. Moreover in this way he not only performed what his Father decreed from all eternity for him but also gave great example to all his apostles and priests until the end of the world. As soon as they have begun their ministry they no longer have father or mother or brothers or sisters; God, and God alone, is everything for them, and they must not concern themselves with anything other than his glory and the doing of his holy will.

This is why Jesus said to his mother: 'What is that to me and to thee?' (tr. from French — not RSV). It is as if he said: 'To say to me, as my mother, that I must begin to work, is not your prerogative as a mother; you have not read from all eternity as I have, who was in the bosom of the Father, what his decrees were about my works of grace. He it is who gives the orders; I am to execute his orders without any intermediary. The hour at which I must begin to operate, the hour decreed from all eternity, has not yet come;

and since my Father's orders have not come, I may not obey you. It is as if you were not my mother on this point.' That is why he calls her 'woman', to show that it is not as his mother commanding him that she will be heard but because it was a prayer. That prayer of Mary is all-powerful and is always heard because it is a prayer of the Mother of God: 'She herself was heard (the Mother of God) because of the reverence due to her' (cf Heb 5:7); not as a duty however but as a grace.

Mary, who had been led to the wedding-feast inspired by the Holy Spirit, her Spouse, had not acted as mother either, nor had she desired to ask for something as due to her but simply as a favour. And Jesus, knowing perfectly well the sentiments of his mother's heart, since that wonderful heart was in perfect unity with his own and since all her sentiments came from Jesus, spoke in a totally different way in the interior of her heart. He spoke the external words either to instruct his mother at the beginning of his ministry, or only to give a lesson to those present. He made all his Father's plans known to her, and let her clearly understand that her prayer was heard, that his Father had taken account of her prayer and that, because of his great love for her, the Father had anticipated the hour of Jesus' miracles and preaching.

And so these seemingly harsh words to Mary showed that mother of divine love the greatness of the Father's love for her and the great function she is called to exercise in holy Church by means of her all-powerful prayers. She does not give commands to the Head of the Church in virtue of her nature, but she gives him 'commands' by grace, by means of her prayers, which are always heard.

5. Dicit mater ejus ministris:  
Quodcumque dixerit  
vobis, facite.

5. *His mother said to the  
servants, "Do whatever he  
tells you."*

Mary, full of the love radiating from the heart of Jesus, sensing her Son's submission to her maternal prayer, perfectly aware of the depths of God's plans for her, and knowing that the favour



had been granted, told the servants to do whatever her Son would tell them.

Mary thus shows that she was perfectly informed by the Holy Spirit about the fulfilment of her request and the working of the mysterious miracle. For, as we shall see further on, this was a figure of the beginning of the Church and had to be done through her intercession. For if she had not known this, why would she tell the servants what to do? Jesus did not need anyone to give him assistance. It was more natural for him to multiply the few drops of wine that still remained, as Elisha did with the oil, or produce wine in the jars without any help. But he had to accomplish a mystery, and Mary knew all about it, so she saw to it that what her Son was to say should be meticulously carried out. At the same time she taught us to be faithful and exact in doing everything her Son commands if we want to obtain great graces from him.

We see by the way people acted toward Mary how greatly she was respected by the wedding-guests. See how they do what she says, she seems to be almost in command. The wedding-feast represents the Church of Jesus Christ, where souls are espoused by the divine Spirit. Mary prays for and obtains power, joy and consolation for those who are thus admitted to the holy nuptials. On the other hand, she procures the joy of the divine Spouse by inspiring fidelity to all that he wills. The children of the Church have profound respect for her and look upon her as their mistress and benefactress.

6. Erant autem ibi lapideae  
hydriae sex positae  
secundum purificationem  
Judaeorum capientes  
singulae metretas  
binas vel ternas.

6. *Now six stone jars were  
standing there, for the  
Jewish rites of purification,  
each holding twenty or  
thirty gallons.*

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| 7. Dicit eis Jesus: (Implete) hydrias aqua. Et impleverunt eas usque ad summum.   | 7. <i>Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.</i>   |
| 8. Et dicit eis Jesus: Haurite nunc et ferte architriclino. Et tulerunt.  | 8. <i>He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it.</i>  |
| 9. Ut autem gustavit architriclinus aquam vinum factam, et non sciebat unde esset, ministri autem sciebant qui hauserant aquam, vocat sponsum architriclinus. | 9. <i>When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom</i> |
| 10. et dicit ei: omnis homo primum bonum vinum ponit; et quum inebriati fuerint, tunc id quod deterius est: tu autem servasti bonum vinum usque adhuc.        | 10. <i>and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."</i>   |

The jars or containers represented the Old Law. They were six in number. This is the number of days in the week, representing the Old Law, which was a law of labour and had to come before the day of rest of the New Law. This latter is only one day, to manifest that there will be no more change until the end of the world, for that is what is represented by the unit one; the unit one also represents the perfection of the New Law.

These jars contained two or three measures, the measure was incom-

plete and only approximate, signifying the imperfection of this law, its uncertainty and lack of fullness. The jars were empty, because the law was scarcely observed any longer at the time our Lord came into this world. Our Lord made the servants fill the jars, because he had come to fulfil the law and he submitted to it in the most perfect way, making the least of his actions conform to what was written. How frequently we read in the gospel, 'as it is written' or again, 'that the scripture might be fulfilled'. And we see the servants in our Lord's name fill the empty jars completely. It means the law by itself was empty, all its fullness was drawn from our Lord and it could be observed only through his grace and support. That is why he himself had to give the order that the jars should be filled. He did not fill them himself but through his servants, because the Old Law and all the graces our Lord accorded it were given only through the mediation of angels. He made them pour in water to show that the substance of the Old Law was but weakness and emptiness. Whatever good it contained did not come from itself, it was only water.

Jesus then changed this water into wine. The water of the Old Law was changed into the wine of the New Law, the law of grace, which is substantial and possesses all the qualities wine represents. This wine was incomparably better than what had been first served. The graces communicated by the Old Law did not come from the law, but from our Lord; it was wine, but low grade in comparison with that of the law of grace. Hence this represents the superiority of the graces given in the New Law over those given under the old dispensation.

11. Hoc fecit initium signorum  
Jesus in Cana Galileae: et  
manifestavit gloriam suam; et  
crediderunt in eum discipuli  
ejus.

11. *This, the first of his signs,  
Jesus did at Cana in  
Galilee, and manifested his  
glory; and his disciples  
believed in him.*

This sign was to be the first. At the beginning of his ministry the perceptible miracle he worked had to be the sign and meaning of the imperceptible miracles which he was to work throughout the



course of his ministry and for as long as the world would exist. This is how he manifested his glory in all kinds of ways. He manifested his power by this miracle and the glory he was to have in the Church by this sign.

12. Post hoc descendit Capharnaum ipse, et mater ejus, et fratres ejus, et discipuli ejus; et ibi manserunt non multis diebus.

12. *After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.*

Capernaum means city of consolation, because in that city the consolation of Israel began to be revealed most brilliantly. It was situated in the territories of Zabulon and Nephtali, by the sea of Galilee. The people who lived there were in great darkness and ignorance, concerned exclusively with the things of this world. It was there the Father had determined from all eternity that the great light should appear and he had announced it by his prophet of consolation — Isaiah (Is 9:1).

That is why our Lord brought his mother and brothers there and established his dwelling there, so as to enlighten this region with his divine light. For although Jesus was constantly travelling through Judea and Galilee, this did not prevent him from coming back frequently to Capernaum near his mother. Although he never remained there for long, nevertheless he was more frequently there than in any other spot in Judea or Galilee.

There is another reason our Lord established his home in Capernaum. Having to leave his mother in order to go about his great ministry, he wanted to withdraw her from the wicked territory of Nazareth where he had few chosen ones in order that the honour and reverence be given her which befitted the Mother of God. And since he was going to make Capernaum resplendent by his miracles and preaching it was the place where his mother would be best honoured. His care and wish to have his mother respected

are clear.

And so his mother and brothers followed him to Capernaum to establish their dwelling there. So also did his disciples, because their Master was to do wonders there. However, our Lord did not spend much time there because his Father's will called him elsewhere to observe the law and carry out his ministry.

### *The cleansing of the Temple*

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| 13. Et prope erat Pascha<br>Judaeorum, et ascendit Jesus<br>jerosolymam.  | 13. <i>The Passover of the Jews<br/>was at hand, and Jesus<br/>went up to Jerusalem.</i>   |
| 14. Et invenit in templo<br>vendentibus boves, et oves,<br>et columbas, et numularios<br>sedentes.  | 14. <i>In the temple he found<br/>those who were selling<br/>oxen and sheep and<br/>pigeons, and the money-<br/>changers at their business.</i>  |
| 15. Et cum fecisset quasi flagell-<br>um de funiculis, omnes ejecit<br>de templo, oves quoque et<br>boves, et numulariorum<br>effudit aes, et mensas subvertit. | 15. <i>And making a whip of<br/>cords, he drove them all,<br/>with the sheep and oxen,<br/>out of the temple; and he<br/>poured out the coins of<br/>the money-changers and<br/>overturned their tables.</i> |
| 16. Et his, qui columbas<br>vendebant, dixit: Auferte ista<br>hinc, et nolite facere domum<br>Patris mei domum<br>negotiationis.                                | 16. <i>And he told those who<br/>sold the pigeons, "Take<br/>these things away; you<br/>shall not make my Father's<br/>house a house of trade."</i>  |

17. Recordati sunt vero discipuli ejus, quia scriptum est: Zelus domus tuae comedit me.

17. *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me."*

The Pharisees' zeal was not pure; hence they got agitated about things of little importance and permitted things to pass that were reprehensible. God's Temple had become a place for transacting business, and the Pharisees remained silent about this; but our Lord being full of true love for his Father's glory and devoured with zeal for his house was unable to tolerate this abuse. He used his power to destroy it.

Is it a wonder that people who had no faith in our Lord, who did not even know him, let themselves be cast out from a place in which, over the years, they had engaged in commerce without any public authority ever preventing them? Yet they were uncouth people, whom our Lord's action hindered from making hoped-for gain. They saw a Galilean who had no authority in their eyes for this sort of thing, yet they obeyed without daring to resist this solitary man who thus drove them all out (of the Temple.) They were astonished and asked, 'By what authority do you do these things?' (cf Mk 11:28). But they left the place even so. Because the divine power, which was hidden from them, was acting on them, they felt forced to obey in spite of wanting the opposite. This amazed them; they sensed an authority they could not explain.

But why had our Lord waited so long to abolish this abuse? Every year he went to Jerusalem with his mother, from the time of his childhood; from the first moment of his life on earth he had had the same insight, the same zeal and the same power. Why did he not use them before? During his hidden life he preferred to remain hidden. He had no desire or obligation to act in public and engage in works of zeal; these were reserved for his public life; but once this time had arrived he fought the dis-



order at once.

In this way he shows us that we must not undertake to correct disorders before we have authority to do so or the Holy Spirit inspires it. Before that we must remain quiet and sometimes suffer sin and other evils, being content to deplore them in God's presence and pray for him to intervene.

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| 18. Responderunt ergo Judaei et dixerunt ei: Quod signum ostendis nobis quia haec facis?  | 18. <i>The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?"</i>   |
| 19. Respondit Jesus et dicit eis: Solvite templum hoc, et in tribus diebus excitabo illud.  | 19. <i>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."</i>  |
| 20. Dixerunt ei Judaei: Quadraginta et sex annis aedificatum est templum hoc, et tu in tribus excitabis illud?                                | 20. <i>The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"</i>   |
| 21. Ille autem dicebat de templo corporis sui.  | 21. <i>But he spoke of the temple of his body.</i>  |
| 22. Cum ergo resurrexisset a mortuis, recordati sunt discipuli ejus quia hoc dicebat, et crediderunt Scripturae, et sermoni quem dixit Jesus. | 22. <i>When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.</i> |

The power our Lord exercised on these people to make them do his Father's will was a great grace and a great miracle. The effect

they felt at the time must have touched them and inspired them to be more docile. But that was not enough. They were so rough and carnal that divine inspiration meant nothing to them; they wanted to see some great prodigy before they believed. Indeed, their excessive curiosity to see a miracle performed was the principal reason for asking a sign; they really had no desire to believe and be faithful. This desire to see miracles came also in part from a self-love that sprang from national glory. They gloried in having prophets and miracle-workers, not for the glory of God but for human glory. They gloried also in their future Messiah. For a long time there had been no prophets among them and they were glad to see one doing miracles. They had only evil dispositions; signs, far from making them faithful and truly attached to our Lord, gave them only passing satisfaction and a feeling of wonder with the result that their last state was worse than their first.

Hence our Lord, far from gratifying this evil curiosity, did just the opposite. Every time they were eager to see a miracle he referred to a greater miracle, namely, that of overcoming their malice. He never granted a miracle to those who asked for it for their amusement and who interiorly were unfaithful and lacking in faith. On the contrary, he never refused miracles to those who had faith and asked with proper dispositions.

The reason our Lord always referred the curious to the miracle of his resurrection was that this miracle was destined finally to be like a magnet attracting the elect and at the same time a stumbling-block leading unbelievers to ultimate loss.

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| <p><b>23.</b> Cum autem esset Jerosolymis<br/>in Pascha in die festo,<br/>multi crediderunt in nomine<br/>ejus, videntes signa ejus,<br/>quae faciebat.</p> | <p><b>23.</b> <i>Now when he was in<br/>Jerusalem at the Passover<br/>feast, many believed in his<br/>name when they saw the<br/>signs which he did;</i></p> |
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The faith the crowd had was a weak faith, almost entirely of human and imaginative origin. They had been waiting on the

Messiah for a long time but when our Lord appeared performing great miracles, astounded, they were struck with joy, for they were eager for miracles. They became excited and warmly proclaimed him as the promised Messiah. But this was not a solid fire; it had little support from the grace of God in contrast with the faith of the good Israelites. It was based rather on the imaginary glory of the nation and the hope of their deliverance from Roman oppression. They were not attached to our Lord but they cried out, 'how wonderful' and acclaimed him as the Messiah. Thus it is written, 'and they believed in his name'. They placed their satisfaction not in our Lord as in the Messiah, but in a vain and comforting fantasy of seeing great miracles and finally possessing their Messiah.

24. Ipse autem Jesus non  
credebat semetipsum eis,  
eo quod ipse nosset omnes.

24. *but Jesus did not  
trust himself to them,*

25. Et quia opus ei non  
erat ut quis testi-  
monium perhiberet de  
homine: ipse enim sciebat  
quid esset in homine.

25. *because he knew all  
men and needed no one  
to bear witness of man; for  
he himself knew what was  
in man.*

Jesus knew everything that was taking place in each of them. He knew what lay behind the feelings of each one; he had no need to ask anyone to give testimony about the dispositions of these people, for he penetrated into the depths of their hearts and knew each one better than he knew himself. All that was good in each one came from Jesus alone; that was why he knew what was in each one. He knew also what would become of everyone if these attitudes continued, for he foresaw the varied destinies to which these interior dispositions would give rise.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Conversation with Nicodemus*

1. Erat autem homo ex phariseis, Nicodemus nomine, princeps Judaeorum.

1. *Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*

Nicodemus was one of the leaders of the synagogue, so he was versed in knowledge of the law. He was a Pharisee, hence a strict observer of the law in its purity (according to the ideas they had of it) and very zealous. He was a genuinely pious sincere person and humbler than the ordinary run of Pharisees of his time.

2. Hic venit ad Jesum nocte, et dixit ei: (Rabbi), scimus quia a Deo venisti magister : nemo enim potest haec signa facere quae tu facis, nisi fuerit Deus cum eo.

2. *This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."*

Because he was well disposed and truly longing to see the glory of the Messiah he was open to receive promptings of grace, and faith had entered his soul. Ordinary Pharisees would have wanted our Lord to court and flatter them, they could not suffer anyone to elevate himself above them and dare to reprove them for their detestable faults. But Nicodemus, in the sincerity of his soul, recognised the one sent by God in the person of our Lord, and he did not consider he was abasing himself by coming to see him, although he was a prince of the people and had a higher rank than the other Pharisees.

Nevertheless, when we consider the beginning of Nicodemus' conversion and the beginning of that of the other disciples, we see a great

difference. The latter were incomparably above Nicodemus. In their approach to our Lord we see more courage and less hesitation. And their minds were more enlightened, although Nicodemus was a man instructed in the law and the prophets while the disciples were not; and there was less reserve in their words. This is because Nicodemus was at the head of the people; he was a Pharisee and a doctor of the law. This was the threefold reason that he feared to compromise himself by seeming to approve of our Lord publicly. His being a Pharisee also made him fear the other Pharisees. He was a prince of the people and did not wish to espouse this cause ardently, as the people were doing. His hesitations and his working in the dark came from the fear either of being seen or of making a mistake.

Fear of making a mistake can have two foundations: that of fearing to offend God by falling into an error that would displease him and might have evil consequences; this is a good sort of fear. But the fear of displeasing people and losing something of their esteem has its source in self-love. This is common in people who have a certain high rank or are learned, as was Nicodemus. Ordinarily we yield to illusions. We find all sorts of reasons for justifying our conduct, which quite simply is founded on self-love. Grace has a hard time triumphing in such souls; and in spite of most remarkable graces such persons do things very imperfectly. On the contrary, simple souls like Nathanael, for example, do not start reasoning about the consequences; they do not worry about what people might think of their conduct. They go straight to God and follow God's impulse with simplicity and fidelity. That is why Nathanael was filled with the greatest graces from the first moment and received great lights.

As regards knowledge, there are two kinds of knowledge of God. The first is acquired through the Spirit of our Lord in mental prayer, prayers and mortifications, or through God's extraordinary inspiration. This knowledge is totally good, it enlightens the soul in its most intimate depths, draws it Godwards, gives it the warmth of love and strength to be faithful to God. The second kind of knowledge of God is acquired by the labour of the human mind. When the object of this knowledge happens to be holy things, the intention with which we

labour to acquire it is more or less holy. Frequently, however, there is an admixture of all sorts of bad intentions, and almost always self-love. But because the effort to acquire it is purely human, this sort of work, together with the bad intentions mingled with it, gives rise to a knowledge which inflates the heart, prompts attachment to self and causes self-love to become ever more deep-rooted. As a consequence it makes the soul weaker in pursuit of the good, timid in embracing and following it. Such a soul then acquires the faults and manifold imperfections of human prudence, which is always eager to spare itself under the illusory pretext of God's glory. Finally it makes the soul less capable of receiving the lights and graces of God in proportion to the amount of self-love and other imperfections in it. 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and reprove the prudence of the prudent' (Is 29:14; 1 Cor 1:19).

Nicodemus' knowledge of the law was of this second kind. It had some of its defects; nevertheless the good intentions were greater. This is why he approached our Lord, but with caution, and why he had some minimum knowledge about this adorable person. He called our Lord Rabbi, although he passed for the son of Joseph of Nazareth; this is a proof of his good dispositions.

Nicodemus, in using this form of address, said our Lord was sent by God to teach others: Master. He must have thought that Jesus was the Messiah, for the Messiah was expected to come at that time and the Pharisees had that idea about St John the Baptist. Moreover Nicodemus must have known St John's answer and his testimony about Jesus; nevertheless he did not say this to our Lord. This reveals the reserve of someone who prudently avoids advancing too far. He said something but did not dare to say everything. He said 'Master' because of the admirable beauty of his teaching.

We notice also from what he says that Nicodemus had no clear notion of the person of our Lord, unlike Nathanael, who said: 'You are the Son of God.' All that Nicodemus knew was based on facts: God must be with someone who works such great miracles. Nathanael also based himself on a miraculous fact; the miracle impressed him, but he immediately put it aside. He did not even speak about it, but



the words he uttered proclaimed on the contrary a mind fixed on our Lord with full attention and enlightened about his person through supernatural lights: 'You are the Son of God...' But Nicodemus indulges in reasoning and draws conclusions which follow rigorously from facts. He does not go beyond that. His mind is more fixed upon his reasoning and draws more light from it than directly from our Lord's person.

3. Respondit Jesus et dixit  
ei: Amen, amen dico tibi: nisi  
quis renatus fuerit denuo,  
non potest videre regnum  
Dei.

3. *Jesus answered him,  
"Truly, truly, I say to you,  
unless one is born anew, he  
cannot see the kingdom  
of God."*

Nicodemus, although still imperfect in his faith and conduct, nevertheless had good desires. He had come to find out about the person of our Lord and his teaching; he still had crude human ideas about the kingdom of God and had not yet renounced the world and his self-love; this was the great obstacle to his progress in faith and in knowledge of the mysteries of God. Human science and attachment to self and creatures: all this represented the 'old man' who was still alive in Nicodemus, the natural man. In spite of that our good Saviour received him with kindness, though he saw him coming with so many imperfections. He gave him all the instructions Nicodemus was disposed to receive and kindly answered all his questions.

O Jesus, how great is your love for the poor people we are: I am ignorant and full of imperfections and defects as Nicodemus was. Receive me also with that entrancing goodness, and please instruct me also!

The kingdom of God of which our Lord spoke means his perfect reign by glory in the souls in heaven, his reign by grace in the souls living in his Church on earth. In both these kingdoms God reigns first in our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him over souls. And the first knowledge that ought to be acquired about the reign of God in us

who live on earth is knowledge of the reign of God in his Son. From him we receive the extension of his reign in the souls united to this adorable Head. The kingdom of God resides totally in his Son, and we have a share in it only through adoption by grace which we receive from this well-beloved Son. Now the kingdom of God in his Son, and through him in the Church, can be properly known only by a living faith animated by the Holy Spirit; it can in no way be acquired by human research. For, as St Paul says, the things of God cannot be known except through the Spirit of God, who reveals not only God's reign in the Church and in his relations with human beings but even the depths of God himself (cf 1 Cor 2:10-11).

This is what our Lord said to Nicodemus: one must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Note that our Lord said 'see'; we cannot even conceive it and acquire a true intimate knowledge of it without being born again. We have in us the first birth received from Adam, natural birth, the source of natural tastes, inclinations, lights and life. But this nature of itself cannot conceive the reign of God in souls and in his Son; it can do so still less because it is corrupted by sin. So it has to be reborn; it must acquire a spiritual and supernatural life in order to know and conceive divine and supernatural things. This second birth is spiritual and supernatural; it gives supernatural life, tastes, inclinations and lights.

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| <p>4. Dicit ad eum Nicodemus:<br/>Quomodo potest homo nasci,<br/>cum sit senex? Numquid<br/>potest in ventrem matris<br/>suae iterato introire, et renasci?</p> | <p>4. <i>Nicodemus said to him,<br/>"How can a man be born<br/>when he is old? Can he<br/>enter a second time into<br/>his mother's womb and be<br/>born?"</i></p> |
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Nicodemus understood somewhat why our Lord said we cannot know the kingdom of God as long as we are in the old corrupt nature which we hold from Adam through our birth, for he must have known that we are born in sin. But he erred like all the other Jews, who believed that people are justified by the works of the law. This was very

convenient, because people thus followed all the natural desires of their hearts, at the same time practising the external works demanded by the law.

Nicodemus seems even to have understood that we must relinquish our natural desires and inclinations, and that it was this our Lord meant to say when he implied that our former birth does not allow us to see the kingdom of God. But as Nicodemus had no idea of the interior action of the Holy Spirit in souls he could form no idea of this new birth. He may have understood that the new birth was to give us new life and other inclinations but he could not think how it would come about. 'I cannot return to my mother's womb', he said, 'in order to take on another nature. My first birth was not a success. I received a corrupt nature; I came out of my mother's womb deformed. How can I return to the womb to acquire a new form, so as to be born in a form that is completely different from what I am now, able to see the kingdom of God'. This was a quite valid argument for one who had no idea of the spiritual life and the power of God.

Nicodemus knew very well our Lord was right and wanted to say something wise. Hence he was not scandalised by an answer that seemed singular and surprising. This shows that grace was truly touching his soul and confirming it in its good dispositions. For where could we find a learned doctor of the law, respected by his people, a doctor who was also a prince and a great person in the world, who would not despise and be scandalised at words that seemed meaningless and very strange.

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| <p>5. Respondit Jesus: Amen, amen dico tibi, nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu Sancto, non potest introire in regnum Dei.</p> | <p>5. <i>Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.</i></p> |
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With infinite kindness our Lord took account of Nicodemus' weakness and ignorance and replied to everything he said and everything he had in his mind. He began by explaining what the



rebirth he had spoken of meant. So he repeated the same sentence explaining it more fully, adding the instruction: our soul has to be reborn of water and the Holy Spirit. Water is the figure and the Holy Spirit is the reality. This spiritual rebirth is accomplished like our natural birth and produces similar effects. In our natural birth we are first in the womb of our mother as in a prison. We are bound and pinioned there, unable to make vital movements, although we exist and live; we are as it were non-entities to the world into which we shall soon enter. Similarly in the second birth: before being born, our soul is in the prison of sin; we are bound and pinioned and are unable to make any vital movement, although we exist and are alive with a natural life. In the natural state we relate to the things that surround us, our intellect conceives ideas of them and our will embraces them. These three powers remain. Further, we are non-entities in the kingdom of God, which is a new world unknown to us. The opposite to all this happens when we arrive in the world. It is the same in our spiritual birth. 'He cannot enter': here our Lord says more than in verse three, and yet it is the same thing. For it is possible to see the kingdom of God without entering into it. In order to see it we must have the Holy Spirit, since it is only in his light that we can see it. Now as soon as we have the divine Spirit in us we are in the kingdom of God. But without this divine Spirit it is impossible to enter into it; for this birth takes place through the Holy Spirit.

We are dead before baptism, we have no life in our souls. For all life is in God, who alone has life in himself, as chapter one said. Before baptism God is not in our soul in a living way, that is, he is not in our soul as our soul is in our body. He is not in it as the principle of our tendencies, views and ideas or of our love. Our soul acts independently of God, consults him in nothing, does not receive influence from him in all its movements so as to follow him; it follows its own influences. But after baptism the Holy Spirit dwells in us in a vital and life-giving way. He is there to be the principle of all its movements; he becomes, as it were, the soul of our soul. It falls to us to let ourselves be touched and influenced by him and to fol-

low more or less his holy promptings, according to grace and our more or less good dispositions. The more the Holy Spirit becomes the principle of the movements of our soul, the more he influences our sentiments and dispositions, the more we follow him, the more perfect also will life be in us and so much more holy shall we be.

If after baptism we move away from that divine influence of the Holy Spirit through the state of mortal sin, our soul then once again becomes dead, because its soul, which is the Holy Spirit, no longer dwells in it and no longer communicates his life to it. This is why damnation is called eternal death, because souls which are in this unfortunate state have lost the divine spirit, who should be animating them in such a marvellous manner, and this will last forever. What a tragedy!

Our divine Master uses a different term here to give two instructions which in reality constitute only one. Without water and the Holy Spirit one cannot enter into the kingdom of God on earth, that is, into the Church, or into God's kingdom in heaven, that is into glory. The two things constitute only one: the reign of God in souls is one and the same reign. He who dies while living under his rule upon earth, that is to say, if God has reigned in him on earth, will enter into his reign in heaven. If, on the contrary, he dies in disobedience to his rule upon earth, correspondingly he will not be in God's heavenly reign. In that case the soul being dead, not possessing the Holy Spirit, it can no longer acquire him; and being unable to acquire him it will remain dead and cannot come under the reign of God.

The only difference between these two reigns of God is that the earthly one is imperfect. When we are born into it we can still die; being dead, one still rests within the enclosure of the kingdom, for although the soul no longer enjoys God's reign in the depth of its being, it still bears the mark and character of those who belong to God in his earthly kingdom. God's kingdom in heaven is perfect and no soul can be admitted to it which does not come to it with the Holy Spirit and is not truly under God's reign. If a soul has not been wholly and perfectly submissive to this divine reign upon

earth, if the Holy Spirit has not been the principle of that soul's affections, desires and tendencies and if it has conserved those of its former nature, such a soul when it presents itself at the heavenly kingdom cannot be received there. It needs purification of these extraneous things. Only divine tendencies inspired by the Spirit of God may remain; they were formerly in the soul in a veiled way and now become manifest.

When our Lord says: '*Amen, amen, dico...*' 'Truly, truly I say to you...' these words usually indicate special emphasis. Here he uses these words in opposition to the ideas of Nicodemus, who previously thought that practising the law sufficed. After that Nicodemus also showed by his reply that he thought there was a way to cure corrupted nature other than by a necessary rebirth.

6. Quod natum est ex carne,  
caro est; et quod natum  
est ex spiritu, spiritus est.

6. *That which is born of the  
flesh is flesh, and that  
which is born of the Spirit  
is spirit.*

That which is born of the flesh could not be anything but flesh. The fruit gathered from seed cast in the ground will be like the seed. It follows that everything that comes from the flesh is nothing but flesh; and if we were to enter again into our mothers' wombs to be born again, we would be born once more as carnal people and all our affections, desires — the whole life we would receive from the flesh — would likewise be flesh. But that which is born of the Spirit will be spirit, for the same reason. And because we are talking here about a spiritual and supernatural life, the birth that produces it must be spiritual and supernatural, which means a birth which comes from the Holy Spirit.

In our Lord's statement we see the two kinds of life that are found in us, spoken of by St Paul: two opposed lives causing continual warfare: the life of the flesh which comes from nature, which we have received from our carnal birth, and the life of the Spirit, which we owe to the Holy Spirit, through the grace of our adorable Lord



Jesus (cf Gal 5:17; Rom 7:23).

7. Non mireris quia dixi  
tibi: Oportet vos nasci  
denuo.

7. *Do not marvel that I said  
to you, 'You must be born  
anew'.*

'Therefore be not astonished when I tell you, you must be born again,' Jesus says. 'Since everything in you is evil and incapable of bringing you to see and enjoy the kingdom of God, you need another principle of life, you need another birth, a spiritual birth'.

8. Spiritus ubi vult spirat, et  
vocem ejus audis, sed nescis  
unde veniat, aut quo vadat:  
sic est omnis qui natus est  
ex spiritu.

8. *The wind blows where it  
wills, and you hear the  
sound of it, but you do  
not know whence it comes  
or whither it goes; so it is  
with every one who is  
born of the Spirit."*

'But you fail to understand how this spiritual birth takes place. It is my Father's Spirit who accomplishes it, and the same things happen in that birth or operation of the divine Spirit as happens with a breath of wind. The wind blows without anything attracting it more to one place than another; it blows by the will that impels it "where it wishes". You hear its voice when it blows but you do not see it; neither do you see its origin or destination: "whence it comes or whither it goes". So it is with those born of the Holy Spirit. The divine Spirit blows where he wills. "The will of my Father determines his divine breath". The rebirth of our soul is always pure grace, and strictly speaking no one can ever merit it. We can touch the heart of God by practising natural virtues to obtain his great mercy, but it will always be simply pure mercy, however unfailing God's response.

We can also say: the divine Spirit breathes where he wills. 'You have no element of life in yourself on which you could draw to

accomplish that rebirth. You even have all the elements which can oppose and impede it. But the divine Spirit draws this life from himself and breathes where he wants to establish it, even in the mire and dirt of your evil nature, dead and destitute of everything'.

Secondly, those who receive this new birth do not see the divine Spirit coming; they recognise him only through the effects they experience in their souls, which become completely changed. They hear the voice of this divine Spirit, the sweet heavenly voice, which gives a sweet fragrance to the soul and makes it realise it has a life other than the one it had before. Blessed are those who hear this divine voice and follow it! Most holy and most adorable Spirit of my Jesus, let me hear your sweet loving voice. Refresh me by your delightful breath. Divine Spirit, I wish to be before you as a light feather, so that your breath may carry me off where it wishes and that I may never offer it the least resistance.

Thirdly, 'you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes'. Our Lord says that those born in this manner do not see him who carries out this rebirth in them. They do not know whence he has come nor where he is going; they do not see him either in his origin or in his end. We have a divine person living and working in our soul; we sense his operation, which is this new life, but we feel nothing beyond that; we do not feel the person himself, either in his origin or in the aim he pursues.

9. Respondit Nicodemus et dixit  
ei: Quomodo possunt  
haec fieri?

9. *Nicodemus said to him,  
"How can this be?"*

Nicodemus' answer reveals a serious weakness of faith. He did not understand what the Master sent by God was saying, he had no knowledge of supernatural and interior things, no experience. He should have attributed the whole fault of this ignorance to himself and believed our Lord's word — although without understanding it — as the man born blind did, who worshipped our Lord as soon as he was told he was the Son of God. He should have asked our Lord to give

him the grace of this new birth which transcended all his views, as we shall see the Samaritan woman does in the following chapter: 'Lord, give me that water' (Jn 4:15). But Nicodemus lacked that simplicity. His knowledge of the law had given him the habit, as still happens quite often, of judging everything by his own mind and not admitting even divine things which he did not understand.

Nowadays those who commit such faults will accept a good number of mysteries which no mind can penetrate, but when it comes to incomprehensible things — like those brought up with Nicodemus — which they fail to understand because they are not leading interior lives they refuse to admit them, and say: how can such things be done ? And frequently they even scoff at them. Nevertheless Nicodemus was not wholly without faith, for he did not reject it but merely hesitated.

10. Respondit Jesus: Tu  
es Magister in Israel,  
et haec ignoras?

10. *Jesus answered him, "Are  
you a teacher of Israel,  
and yet you do not under-  
stand this?"*

Our Lord reproved him for his little faith. Nicodemus did not believe; he was astonished at what eternal Truth was teaching because he had no knowledge of the things being taught him. At the same time it was most strange that he would not know these things. He was a doctor in Israel and should have known what the prophets say on this point, for the prophets had predicted this new birth and this outpouring of the Holy Spirit on souls for the time of the Messiah's coming. For this our Lord reproached him: 'You do not know those things, you are a master in Israel and should be instructing others in all these truths, in order to lead them all to the faith and procure for them the regeneration of which I speak'.

Be careful not to think that the divine Lamb, who is so full of gentleness, peace and love towards souls, wanted to grieve Nicodemus by a kind of irony when he said: 'are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand this?' But he reproved him for his igno-



rance, which was due to the false science of the teachers of that time. They had not a right understanding of the Scriptures because of their ridiculous traditions, and our Lord showed him that the science he had was false. This was to make Nicodemus simpler, prompter to renounce the ideas that stemmed from his learning.

‘You, who are a master in Israel and consequently know the teaching of the law and the prophets, are unaware of these things! You should have known them before I told you and even now you do not know them after I have explained them. This should prove that the science of your doctors is not genuine; be more docile and have faith!’

11. Amen, amen dico tibi, quia  
quod scimus loquimur,  
et quod vidimus testamur,  
et testimonium nostrum  
non accipitis.

11. *Truly, truly, I say to you,  
we speak of what we know,  
and bear witness to what  
we have seen; but you do  
not receive our testimony*

After reproving him for his culpable ignorance, Our Lord reproached him for his want of faith: ‘If you do not understand, believe on my word what you do not know’. After he had humbled Nicodemus for his false science, he exhorted and inspired him to have more faith. ‘Amen, amen I say to you’: these words show that our Lord greatly insisted and spoke in a tone of command, although always with admirable goodness. ‘You make it difficult for yourself to admit what I am saying because you want to understand first. What I am telling you is not a philosophical system nor a tradition I have received from someone else; nor is it the opinion of a doctor which you can scrutinise, as you do in your discussions among yourselves. What I announce to you is certain truth and not a matter for discussion; it is a testimony I give to things which I have seen come to pass’.

When the divine Master speaks of the knowledge he has, he means the essential knowledge the divine Word has about the operations of the Holy Spirit by way of the procession of the Holy Spirit;

and the word by which he gives us a share in this divine knowledge must be the principle of our faith. The testimony he adds consists in this that, since all regeneration comes from our Lord and is communicated by him to souls, there results a very special way of seeing our Lord in these divine regenerations. In his goodness he also gives witness to the graces and merciful gifts he offers sinful souls through his divine Spirit. He complains with sorrowful love that people refuse to accept his testimony.

My most gentle Jesus, if only I could console your heart afflicted so much by the hardness of our hearts, how happy I would be! Tell me, adorable Lord, what you have seen from all eternity in the bosom of your Father. Give me testimony of all the consequences of your love in souls. Most gentle and lovable Lord Jesus, how happy I would be if you granted me this favour! I would believe you with my whole soul with the help of your grace and I would wish to melt away in love before you at all the divine words flowing from your sacred lips!

12. Si terrena dixi vobis, et non creditis: quomodo si dixero vobis caelestia, credetis?

12. *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

Our Lord added: 'When I speak to you about earthly things, that is, created things, such as the grace of God in souls, lower things which can be understood by the human intelligence since they are only about God's relations with souls upon earth, you refuse to believe these things. If so, what then if I spoke to you about heavenly things, things far above what takes place upon earth? If I were to speak to you about the great truths that concern the three divine persons, if I spoke to you about my eternal generation, about the union of the Word with humanity, about all the other mysteries worked in the Incarnate Word and by the Incarnate Word, about his glory in heaven — if I spoke to you about these things, how

would you believe me?’

13. Et nemo ascendit in caelum, nisi qui descendit de caelo, Filius hominis, qui est in caelo.
- 13 *No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.*

‘To ascend to heaven’ means to see God face to face and have possession and essential enjoyment of him. ‘To descend’ does not mean the descent of the wretched Lucifer — that is, to leave heaven so as to be there no longer — but it means having a mission from God, to be involved with human beings according to the divine will, while continuing to possess the divinity and behold it intuitively.

Our Lord’s sacred humanity ascended to heaven from the first moment of its existence because it was hypostatically united with the Word. It has always possessed and contemplated God in himself ‘as he is’ (1 Jn 3:2) and this in a way no creature can grasp, even a heavenly one. The sacred humanity descended from heaven to carry out the Father’s will in order to deal with human beings, to give them knowledge of the sacred mysteries of the divinity and a share in them. The humanity of Jesus ascended to heaven by being assumed into the divine sphere when the Word of God took it into himself and allowed it participate in his divinity. Jesus’ humanity descended from heaven, to engage in work among human beings according to the Father’s will. The involvement of his whole human nature with creatures is a sort of ‘descent’ compared with the ‘ascent’ of his whole human nature to God (when united with the Word). Nevertheless, although Jesus’ human nature has thus ‘descended’ to be involved with people it is also always in heaven, always in God his Father, with the same union, the same vision, the same degree of attention.

So on the one hand our Lord’s adorable humanity is in heaven to possess and know the divinity in a wonderful way and on the other hand it is employed here among us, who are poor, blind and wretched, so as to accept us into itself, bring us to behold and con-



template the divine things it sees in the Father and impart its divine mercy to us. This is meant by the words, 'the Son of man who descended from heaven and who is still in heaven'. To understand what our Lord says, namely, that his sacred humanity — which descended from heaven — is the only one who can go up again to heaven. No one else ascends there, either from here below by perfect contemplation, or after this life by complete union in glory, except in the sacred humanity and through the sacred humanity of Jesus. We must remember the following. The humanity of our adorable Lord, which is always in heaven through its holy and sacred union (with the Word) has descended upon earth to make us ascend with it to heaven. All of us will ascend to his Father in this world by our union with the Son of man through faith in the Incarnate Word. He will ascend to his Father in heaven in union with the same Son of man in heaven because he shares with us the divinity he possesses.

It still remains true that only the Son of man ascends to his Father. All other creatures ascend to that adorable humanity to receive from it and by it a share in his divinity, which it receives immediately from the divine Word. Jesus is the head of the whole body of the elect, receiving divinity into himself on behalf of all humankind; and all the chosen ones in heaven, as well as all people on earth, can receive divinity only through what he passes on, as from head to members. In this way we are coheirs with Jesus Christ, according to the words of St Paul (Rom 8:17).

This then is what our Lord said to Nicodemus: 'In the mysteries of the divinity which I reveal to you I merely give testimony of what I behold and what you yourself are unable to see, for none can see these things except the Son of man who tells you them. And you are unable to ascend to heaven — either while you are upon earth, to see and contemplate these things in God, or in the other world to possess them — except through the Son of man to whom you must cling by faith in this world. Consequently, you must believe his words, even when you do not see the things he speaks of, for it is only through faith that you will be able to see them and not before'.

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14. Et sicut Moyses exaltavit serpentem in deserto, ita exaltari oportet Filium hominis;

14. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up,*

15. ut omnis qui credit in ipsum, non pereat, sed habeat vitam aeternam.

15. *that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*

Our Lord continues: 'If you have not yet this faith, it is because the moment for that grace has not come. It will come on the day the Son of man is lifted up on a cross to heal the wounds the enemy has inflicted on your souls, as Moses did to cure those bitten by a serpent. Until then you will always be weak and languishing in your faith'. Hence 'it is necessary' that the Son of man be crucified to draw you to himself and through the power of the cross to save you from perdition and give you eternal life; but this salvation, this eternal life, will be given only to those who believe in him. Hence the cross has two powers: to draw people to our Lord, communicating the grace of faith to those who are willing to receive it, and to save all those who have genuine living faith.

Observe that Our Lord says: 'And everyone who believes in him'. He does not say 'who believes him' or 'in his name'. These phrases would only indicate a belief in his person, doctrine or teaching, which belief could co-exist with evil conduct. Let those who are in that condition not trust in our Lord's cross; it would condemn rather than save them. It is necessary to believe 'in him', a term which speaks of adherence and union of the soul with our Lord; it indicates a distancing from sin and that all our works originate from a supernatural principle. For if the soul is truly united to our Lord by this genuine perfect faith, then so is its action also, and our Lord is its source.

In all this our divine Master gave great hopes to Nicodemus for the time subsequent to his passion. What goodness, kindness and mercy! Most merciful, most gentle and kind Jesus, I have the hap-

piness of living since your crucifixion. In a marvellous way you have drawn me to yourself. What remarkable mercy towards a poor soul like mine! You have given me the precious gift of faith in you; please increase it, for it is still very weak through my own fault. Grant that by this loving faith I will live only for you and in you, that I will sacrifice myself for your love, as you have sacrificed yourself for mine. By his cross this most gentle Lord will give us eternal life: 'This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (Jn 17:3). The good Nicodemus must have been happy when the great mystery of the cross was accomplished; then he understood better.

Lord Jesus, give me eternal life, I beg you that I may know the only true God, and the One he has sent, you, Jesus Christ, my most loving and merciful Lord and Redeemer. What wonderful knowledge! most lovable Jesus!

16. Sic enim Deus dilexit  
mundum, ut Filium suum  
unigenitum daret: ut  
omnis qui credit in eum,  
non pereat, sed habeat  
vitam aeternam.

16. *For God so loved the world  
that he gave his only Son,  
that whoever believes in  
him should not perish but  
have eternal life.*

These words express three ideas. First, our Lord explains further what he has just said, that it is necessary to believe in the Son of man, not just in a man that is more excellent than all other men and all God's creatures together, but in the Son of God. He is so perfectly united to God that whatever is done by one of the two natures is done by the other. This is why our Lord uses the words 'that he gave', for the Father could not have *given* his wonderful Word to human beings in any other way. For the term 'to give' means to put at their disposal, to give power over him. Now it is impossible for people to exercise power over the Word of God directly. 'Had they known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor 2:8). So much the truer is it here. The Father



united his Word to a human nature that was to be delivered up to the wicked and be crucified. By that fact he has truly given us his eternal Word, immense and omnipotent. He gave him over to the power of human beings, giving them power over that humanity, to which he so intimately united his divine Word. What prodigal love for wretched sinners!

Secondly, our Lord wished to explain why he would be crucified: in order to arouse sentiments of love in Nicodemus' heart and so further open his soul to faith. To explain this prodigy (Jesus Christ crucified for us) Jesus recalls a greater prodigy : God's incomprehensible love for the world, which goes so far as to hand over his only Son to prevent it from being lost and to give eternal life — but only to those who believe in him. This was indeed enough to provide Nicodemus with food for thought, but how would he believe in such an exceptional event since he had refused to believe simpler things? The fortunate Nicodemus, however, was almost forced to believe when the event took place. The love of God beyond all understanding must have flooded his soul. Moreover, our Lord kept his word and drew him to himself. We may even believe that our Lord had already granted him this grace by his divine words, touching him interiorly at the same time. For no longer do we hear him say: 'How can such things be done?' (cf v.9). He listens in silence. It would seem that the Holy Spirit breathed and Nicodemus heard his voice.

Thirdly, by these words of our Lord, Nicodemus, and all of us with him, can understand that we do not confer a favour on our Lord when we believe in him. Whatever the greatness, power and extraordinary genius of a person, when he believes in our Lord he adds nothing to his glory and greatness. On the contrary, to believe in Jesus Christ is the human being's greatest happiness and glory. Our Lord does not need anybody, while all of us absolutely need him. Quite the opposite; it is a great misfortune for anyone, whoever he or she may be, not to believe. This was also a strong motive for Nicodemus to develop the outlook of faith the divine Master desired to inspire in him. Our Lord repeated the words, 'whoever

believes', to show that there will be no distinction, observers of the law or sinners, Jews or pagans, all will be saved if they believe.

17. Non enim misit Deus Filium suum in mundum, ut judicet mundum, sed ut salvetur mundus per ipsum.

17. *For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

Our Lord went on to explain, 'For God has not sent his Son to judge the world. He has not sent him to separate the righteous from the sinners, and to make the righteous triumph, as you Pharisees believe. No, that is not so; the sending of the Son of God is a sending of love and not of justice. His coming is a coming in gentleness not harshness. That is why he will be sacrificed for their salvation and through this sacrifice will give them eternal life. However, although he has come only to save the world, he will also judge it'. This he explains in the two following verses, saying that he is their saviour and their judge.

18. Qui credit in eum, non judicatur; qui autem non credit, jam judicatus est: quia non credit in nomine unigeniti filii Dei.

18. *He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

The two functions of being a saviour and also a judge are united in the person of Jesus; he is judge because he is saviour, as the following verse explains. Those who believe in him are by that very fact exempt from judgement, because the very one who is to judge them has saved them. He will not judge them, since he himself has erased the hand-writing (of the writ of prosecution) of which St Paul speaks (Col 2:14), which was to be the subject matter of their judgment.

Those on the contrary who do not believe are already judged

because they do not believe in the only Son of God. Observe the words: 'is already judged' (RSV: condemned). They bear the burden of sins which are matter for judgment and deserve condemnation. The only Son of God came upon earth to erase those sins. To obtain pardon they would have to believe. These people did not want to believe, and their sins remained. By this very fact their condemnation was already pronounced, because they did not believe in the one name which would have saved them.

Note also the words, 'in the name of the only begotten'. This involves faith in the Incarnation and Redemption, and at the same time supposes faith in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. This faith is absolutely necessary for the remission of past sins. The word 'name' in holy Scripture — and especially on our Lord's lips — means the same thing; for the name is merely the expression and representation of the thing presented to the human intelligence. And faith in the name means faith in the existence of the thing expressed by the name. Our Lord said they are judged because they do not believe *in the name*, since there is no question of works but of the remission of past sins through regeneration, for which interior faith is enough. The will to stop sinning is presupposed. Once these sins are remitted, faith has to be reduced to practice if we want to avoid being judged over again; 'he who believes in him is not judged'. After the regeneration of baptism we receive the perfection of faith by being perfectly united to the only Son of God.

19. Hoc est autem  
judicium: quia lux venit in  
mundum, et dilexerunt  
homines magis tenebras  
quam lucem: erant enim  
eorum mala opera.

19. *And this is the judgment,  
that the light has  
come into the world, and  
men loved darkness  
rather than light, because  
their deeds were evil.*

The judgment of those without faith is in their works; and yet our Lord is their judge. This verse explains how these two things come about and in what our Lord's judgment consists. The Son of God



came to save those who would believe in him. This he did by becoming the light of their souls, by communicating the brightness of his divine perfections. It was a brilliant, infinite light that came into the world. All those who are united to him by faith share in it, and by this means the darkness of the works of the flesh and the devil disappears. As was said above, darkness cannot exist where light is. All of these cannot be judged, because everything that is found in them is light, and so when they appear in the presence of the great light they become one and the same thing with it; and they judge others, according to St Paul, who tells us that the Christians will have to judge even angels, that is to say, the bad angels (cf 1 Cor 6:3). If there exists some stain in them, anything which does not reflect that great divine light, this will have to be erased in purgatory before they are admitted into the sacred presence; and the faults which are not in harmony with faith in him and do not proceed from the light will be judged.

Those on the contrary who remain in the darkness of the flesh and refuse to come to the great light will be rejected and condemned when they appear in the divine presence, because nothing will be found in them pertaining to this divine light, everything in them being incompatible with it. Already in this world they are judged and condemned by this divine light as long as they remain in darkness, in the sense that the light rejects them and casts them outside and refuses absolutely to recognise them as belonging to itself. The reason is that all their works — either interior, such as sentiments, dispositions and acts of the soul, or exterior, proceeding from this wicked interior — are darkness. 'For their works were evil'.

And in all this it is human beings themselves who determine and pronounce their judgment and self-condemnation. For they could have easily accepted the light within them but preferred their own darkness to the light. Once outside this life, they persevere in these evil dispositions and cannot do otherwise. In this way they exile themselves from the eternal light to remain in darkness, either in this world or in eternity, but especially in eternity, where the dread-

ful darkness that fills their souls will be horrible and frightful; and they will be unable to escape from it, in spite of the horror they will have of it and the despair which accompanies it. Furthermore the terrible thing is that they will no longer find that merciful holiness in our Lord which in this world tends to diffuse itself lovingly in souls to draw them to itself and into itself. But this will be a holiness of severity and justice, which will crush sinners who inhabit the dark and reject them with a severity and violence so frightful that it will cast them with frightening speed into even more horrible darkness, and that for all eternity!

We can conclude from this verse that, for regeneration, faith alone does not suffice. Further resolve is necessary to stop leading an evil life, for our Lord tells us that judgment consists in this that people have not given themselves to the light because they love darkness more than the light. Hence to be in the light we must leave the darkness. If this is the judgment, then, in order to avoid it, we must leave the darkness.

20. Omnis enim qui male agit,  
odit lucem, et non venit ad  
lucem, ut non arguantur  
opera ejus.

20. *For every one who does evil  
hates the light, and does  
not come to the light, lest  
his deeds should be  
exposed.*

Our Lord explains how far removed from him the wicked are; they keep him at a distance by a sort of instinct. He uses a comparison: good persons reveal themselves, the wicked hide. Evil people prefer darkness to light. Moreover they even hate the divine light because of their evil works, which are the darkness they love. People who do evil and love the evil they do and want to persevere in it take great care not to come near the Lord; they do not want to look on him with eyes of faith, because our Lord, who is the light, will judge and condemn the evil they do and reproach them for it. That is why such people yield to illusions and blind themselves to everything concerning the divine light. They force themselves to

stay away from it; they reject all intimations of faith and develop a hatred against our Lord, because they are attached to their evil and know they are involved in hatred and opposition to the divine Master. The darkness of sin then becomes so great that the soul is impregnated with it and becomes immersed in (sinful — ed.) flesh and sin; in other words, such a person has no longer any outlook, sentiments or dispositions other than those of (sinful — ed.) flesh and transgression. A sort of opposition between our Lord and this soul sets in.

Our good Master rejects the sin with which such an unfortunate soul is as it were encrusted. He wants to attract it by getting rid of that sin but the person who clings to sin, almost identifying with it daily more and more, rejects the divine Lamb and turns on him in hatred because he opposes what the sinner loves. This is a frightful condition and unfortunately it is that of a great number of godless people in this century. They do not realise this, but that is their situation all the same.

21. Qui autem facit veritatem, venit ad lucem, ut manifestentur opera ejus: quia in Deo sunt facta.

21. *But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.*

But he who does the works of truth has no fear of the light. Instead he always goes towards the light, his tendency is to approach the divine light. Our Lord calls them works of truth or, more accurately, works inspired by grace. This phrase is in contrast to works of the flesh, which are untruth, because they do not belong to God; even worse, they are done in opposition to God, who is essential truth, and outside of him nothing can be true. He calls the works inspired by grace simply 'truth', and not 'works of truth', because the works we do under the inspiration and influence of divine grace are only its development. Grace is the grain of mustard seed developing in souls. Although the soil helps to produce this vegetable, which is like a tree,



it is nevertheless nothing but mustard plant, the development of the little grain. It means that those who do works inspired by divine grace have a supernatural tendency to draw even closer to our Lord, to become ever more united to him. It is as if our soul opens up before him to let what is in us come to light in his divine presence. At such moments a sort of loving satisfaction impels us towards him. This self-revelation, which we desire in and through his light, is sometimes made in his presence, and sometimes by ourselves, so that we can see in his divine light what we are doing or, again, it takes place in the presence of his heavenly Father, to whom the soul offers this activity. And what sort of self disclosure does our soul desire because of this divine light? — that of divine grace within us. Our Lord shows in our soul that whatever it does, is done in God, that is to say, in and by his divine grace: 'because they are done in God'.

When our Lord says, 'he who does what is true comes to the light', he indicates that the soul then habitually walks inspired by grace and divine love and lives a holy life. He says, 'does the truth', because those who live that way habitually perform good works; and such persons are invariably inclined to come closer to the light. When our Lord says, 'his deeds may be clearly seen', he refers to particular good works, carried out inwardly or outwardly.

### *John bears witness for the last time*

22. Post haec venit Jesus et discipuli ejus in terram Judaeam; et illic demorabatur cum eis, et baptizabat.

22. *After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized.*

When our Lord had proclaimed the wonderful and holy doctrine of regeneration, he travelled through Judea to put it into practice, giving the baptism of the Holy Spirit to all those he had disposed through repentance.

23. Erat autem et Joannes baptizans in Aenon juxta Salim; quia aquae multae erant illic, et veniebant, et baptizabantur.

23. *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized*

24. Nondum enim missus fuerat Joannes in carcerem.

24. *For John had not yet been put in prison.*

At the time our Lord began to give baptism in Judea, St John was at Aenon conferring his own. The moment our Lord was beginning to baptize was the time St John was at the height of his activity. That is why John had chosen Aenon to baptize the vast crowds of people who came to him, for there was water in abundance. This was in the order of divine providence, who had given St John the mission of preparing people for the coming of the Messiah, and his baptism of water was to prepare for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, so that when this great baptism was to be conferred by the Son of God, St John was preparing big numbers of people by his own baptism.

The evangelist adds that St John had not yet been put in prison. John still had to give a last testimony to the divine Messiah and he had to terminate the ministry of his own baptism, sending everyone to him who was giving the true baptism of the Holy Spirit. After that, he no longer had any other task on earth and God gave him his reward, for a few days later he was cast into prison and then martyred.

25. Facta est autem quaestio ex discipulis Joannis cum Judaeis de purificatione.

25. *Now a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purifying.*

26. Venerunt ad Joannem,  
et dixerunt ei: Rabbi, qui erat  
tecum trans Jordanem, cui tu  
testimonium perhibuisti, ecce  
hic baptizat, et omnes veniunt  
ad eum.

26. *And they came to John,  
and said to him, "Rabbi,  
he who was with you  
beyond the Jordan, to  
whom you bore witness,  
here he is, baptizing, and  
all are going to him."*

This word *quaestio* means 'discussion'. John's disciples held a discussion about purification. Some preferred our Lord's baptism, others upheld their master's. These then went to see John and told him that the one to whom he had given testimony was baptising and everyone was going to him. They spoke out of their esteem for John and their attachment to him. They were grieved that he to whom John had given great testimony was now taking away John's followers and thus lowering his prestige. God permitted them to have this idea so that John might complete his ministry and give new testimony to his Son

27. Respondit Joannes, et dixit:  
Non potest homo accipere  
quidquam, nisi fuerit ei datum  
de coelo.

27. *John answered, "No one  
can receive anything  
except what is given him  
from heaven."*

St John begins by showing that their idea was not the most enlightened and that they were wrong to grieve. This is a good lesson for God's ministers, who work for his glory, to prevent them from entertaining the kind of ideas that spring from nature and self-love and manifest a zeal neither sufficiently pure nor sufficiently enlightened. You say that people go to him; that is because his baptism has a special power and gift. You take him for an ordinary man; he must therefore have received a special gift, for he cannot have it of himself. No one has anything he has not received, and if he has received the gift of sanctification, he must have received it from God alone, who gave it to him. And if God gave him this mission, adding this gift, why do you worry because



people are leaving me to go to him? That is not seeking God's glory but human glory or rather your own glory. It makes no difference whether it is through those who belong to us or through others that glory is given to God. We must love it wherever it is given and never be envious. This is particularly a lesson for religious groups who may find it hard to see another group prospering and getting preference over their own.

28. Ipsi vos mihi testimonium  
perhibetis, quod dixerim:  
Non sum ego Christus, sed  
quia missus sum ante illum.

28. *You yourselves bear me  
witness, that I said, I am  
not the Christ, but I have  
been sent before him.*

Now John answers his disciples about our Lord's person, referring to the particular fact that pained them. 'You yourselves know and bear witness to what I said about myself and about him. For you yourselves say that I gave witness to him on the other side of the Jordan. You know what I then said, that I was not the Messiah but that I was one sent before him to prepare the way so that when he actually came everybody might recognise him because of my word and go to him. Now that he has come and my preaching is being followed, people go to him and you do not like it! Once the Messiah has come the forerunner is nothing. It is right that all should leave the herald so as to follow the king whom he announced'.

29. Qui habet sponsam, sponsus  
est: Amicus autem sponsi,  
qui stat, et audit eum, gau-  
dio gaudet propter vocem  
sponsi. Hoc autem gaudium  
meum impletum est.

29. *He who has the bride is  
the bridegroom; the  
friend of the bridegroom,  
who stands and hears him,  
rejoices greatly at the  
bridegroom's voice; therefore  
this joy of mine is now full.*

The disciples were astonished that our Lord took away souls from St John's ministry and seemed to consider it ingratitude. St John

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now shows by means of a comparison how just our Lord's conduct was and how things could not be otherwise. It is the bridegroom who has the bride. The bride belongs to him and no one should want to take her away from him. The friend of the bridegroom takes care of adorning and preparing the bride in order that she may please him. This friend has no rights over the bride; all he does is enjoy the presence of the bridegroom and rejoice because of the bridegroom's union with the bride. He remains there with the bride to wait for the bridegroom. When the latter arrives, the friend is there to hear his voice, that voice which reveals the bridegroom's satisfaction with the bride he has prepared for him, because he is there to be united with her.

The bridegroom is our Lord. The bride is the Church or the souls who compose it. The friend of the bridegroom is St John the Baptist. This friend, filled with love for the divine bridegroom, is in admiration as he listens to the divine bridegroom coming to espouse her whom he has so carefully prepared and adorned. And hearing this his joy is fulfilled; he no longer desires anything more in this world. The bridegroom is with his bride; the friend hears his voice full of expressions of love and satisfaction for her whom his dear friend has so well prepared. 'This joy of a friend, which is mine by right,' (St John says — tr.) 'is now accomplished and you are unhappy about what is my greatest source of joy'.

By these words and by his behaviour St John gives a useful lesson to all the friends of the divine bridegroom who have the task of preparing spouses for him. Let them remember that those spouses do not belong to them, they belong to the bridegroom for whom they prepare them. Hence they should not in any way attract their affection to themselves. On the contrary, they must direct all their love toward the divine bridegroom. They should not take anything for themselves nor should they seek their own satisfaction in these brides of the divine bridegroom. All their joy should be in seeing the loving satisfaction of the divine bridegroom united with souls 'his spouses' and hearing him speak to their heart. This purity in the direction of souls is of the utmost importance

30. Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui.

30. *He must increase, but I must decrease."*

Since this is so it is easy to understand St John's further words: The bridegroom must increase by the number of those who become his disciples, and I, who am only the friend, must decrease, since whatever I have is not my own but his. I prepare spouses for him. According as they are ready, they must join their bridegroom and hence leave me.

31. Qui desursum venit, super omnes est. Qui est de terra, de terra est, et de terra loquitur. Qui de caelo venit, super omnes est.

31. *He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; he who comes from heaven is above all.*

32. Et quod vidit et audivit, hoc testatur; et testimonium ejus nemo accipit.

32. *He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony;*

St John adds another reason why our Lord must draw all people to himself and why his voice is so powerful. 'He who comes from above, the Word of God, who descends from the bosom of his Father, is above all; he is master of all. The son is more than the servants. I am only a servant; hence the Son who comes from above has the power to dispose of what was entrusted to me; he has the right to draw souls to himself, taking away those he had first sent to me. We servants, who are only people on earth, who have no power or authority in ourselves since we are only of the earth like the others, whatever power and authority we happen to possess comes only from above, which means that we should see ourselves for what we are and act accordingly: he who is of the earth is of the earth. When the Son comes, who is not of the earth but of heaven, he is our mas-



ter and superior. He disposes of everything according to his liking and we must render him all we owe him. Since we owe everything we must render everything: he who comes from heaven is above all.

‘Moreover, people of the earth are unable to talk of anything but the earth and if they speak about heavenly things they still do it in an earthly way. The knowledge they have of the mysteries of God is poor. They reason about these mysteries using earthly figures and ways. Matters cannot be otherwise for earthly people who are naturally blind and limited. All the things I have told you are earthly — things that have to be done on earth — and it is as a person of this earth that I have spoken about them, I who have neither seen nor heard heavenly things. But he who comes from heaven gives witness to what he himself has heard in the bosom of his Father’. We notice that when St John speaks about himself he says ‘he speaks of the earth’, but when speaking about our Lord he says: ‘he testifies about what he has heard’. One *speaks* about what one has learnt in an indirect way, but one *testifies* to what one has heard personally.

In order to convince his disciples definitively about our Lord's greatness and his power for the salvation of souls and inspire them with sentiments of faith and love towards the divine Master, John adds what follows in the remainder of this chapter. He laments that, in spite of Jesus coming from heaven and giving testimony about what he has personally heard from all eternity in the bosom of the Father, no one wants to accept the heavenly doctrine he teaches and to which he gives such certain and infallible testimony. It seems that St John establishes a parallel which forms the subject-matter of his lament. He seems to say: ‘I who am but earth, and could only speak as an earthly person, was nevertheless believed and listened to by all; but here comes the Son of God issuing from the bosom of his Father and proclaiming a divine doctrine with heavenly words and no one wants to believe him’. The word ‘no one’ shows the fewness of those who believed. John seems to point out to his disciples the opposition between his ideas and theirs. They complained that everyone was going to Jesus Christ; but he complains that no one follows our Lord, no one wants to accept his message and believe

in him.

We could understand the testimony our Lord gives about what he has seen and heard as an interior word with which he wished to penetrate souls by his grace, to establish within them the light and knowledge of those same truths through the faith he wanted to give them. This is the most perfect testimony and the worthiest of the Son of God that can be given to divine mysteries and eternal truths. It is a testimony that speaks not only to eyes and ears externally but to the inmost soul to make it, as it were, see and touch the truth in the most perfect manner of which people are capable on earth. The deplorable thing is that nobody accepts this divine testimony. People reject the light that tries to enlighten their hearts, they refuse grace, they will not acquiesce. In this sense the word 'receives' (his testimony) is correctly employed; otherwise it would be better to say: 'believe in the testimony.'

St John says that our Lord gave testimony about what he had *seen* and *heard*. The two words, *see* and *hear*, are perfectly suitable to human beings, who cannot see what they hear nor hear what they see. But for the word of God, one would think that *to see* already says everything; why does he add *to hear*? He wants us to understand divine things after our fashion and he speaks our language. The term *to see* is perfectly suited to truths contained in divine perfections, which he claims to have seen in his Father from all eternity. The term *to hear* is more suited to truths that belong to the eternal decrees of the Father for his creatures and his relations with them, and to all the mysteries which the Son of God must accomplish on earth and in heaven according to the same decrees of his heavenly Father.

There we have his whole testimony. He says only what he has seen and heard from all eternity and hence he gives testimony to what he sees and hears at the moment. This makes it much more perfect. It is an immense infinite river flowing eternally from the bosom of the Father into his Son. And this testimony of the Incarnate Son is a merciful loving outpouring by the Incarnate Son into the souls of those who believe in him. His testimony is pure;

he gives only what he receives. 'He bears witness to what he has seen and heard...', and yet no one wants to accept the testimony.

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| <p><b>33.</b> Qui accepit ejus testimonium, signavit quia Deus verax est.</p>                       | <p><b>33.</b> <i>he who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.</i></p>                               |
| <p><b>34.</b> Quem enim misit Deus, verba Dei loquitur: non enim ad mensuram dat Deus spiritum.</p> | <p><b>34.</b> <i>For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit;</i></p> |

He who has accepted his testimony has by that very fact subscribed to God's truthfulness, thereby he has participated in the very testimony of Jesus Christ. Our Lord has written these truths, which emanated from his Father, in the spirit and heart of those who received them. The latter, by the agreement and faith with which they cling to them, sign that testimony and affirm that God is truthful in the things he wants taught and to which he makes his Son bear witness. For the word to which one thus subscribes is not a human word but the word of God himself, because the one he has sent speaks only the word which God gave him. We render divine things in human words, but the one who has sent gives the very word of God and that with singular purity. For it is not like those occasions when other prophets are sent by God, each of whom has a limited share in the Spirit of God. Such prophets make known the divine truths they are obliged to hand on as best they can, making use of their own mind and human characteristics. Here there is no measure; the Spirit is communicated in his fullness and nothing is done, nothing said, except through his impulse and inspiration. Consequently he who has received this word and testimony witnesses himself, he declares that the divine word is true and by that very fact that God is truthful.

There is another explanation of our Lord's testimony in souls. When our Lord penetrates a soul to introduce and trace therein the



divine mysteries and perfections, if the soul accepts the divine grace and assents to it then it subscribes to the fact that God is true. By thus receiving this interior word that our Lord wants to inculcate in the soul by his grace — while he speaks to it from the outside also — it receives the very word of God. For the one who is sent by God is not like the prophets and others sent by God. He speaks the very word of God and introduces this word into souls. This word of God is always efficacious; it contains all the truths it expresses. The divine word which makes itself felt and heard in the interior of a soul offers it the truths, mysteries and perfections themselves that it contains; and the soul which accepts all these subscribes and testifies to their truth and subscribes to the truth of the word of God that it receives substantially. St John says: 'he who received his testimony sets his seal to this...', and not, 'he who accepts signs'. This might refer to his lament that no one accepts Jesus' testimony. St John adds that those who accepted it set their seal to its truth. One could also add that all of this is a Hebrew way of speaking.

There is still another explanation. When our Lord speaks this way to a soul — either by external testimony or by an interior word — a faithful listening soul joyfully opens itself to let the divine word enter. This first movement is truly an acceptance of our Lord's testimony or word. The soul places no obstacle in the way; it lets him enter. The soul is before our Lord as Martha's sister was before him; she listened and his divine words entered. This is acceptance. The soul that accepts the divine word does not remain idle but necessarily makes acts of assent, either of faith or love, acts which confirm like a signature the truths revealed. So St John says in general terms that the person who has accepted this testimony has by these different acts confirmed God's truthfulness.

35. Pater diligit Filium; et  
omnia dedit in manu ejus.

35. *the Father loves the Son,  
and has given all things  
into his hand.*

St John explains the fullness our Lord received and the difference between him and others who were sent. The difference is in the special love of the Father for his Son, a special love not given to anyone else. The Father places everything he has into his hands, and therefore confers the fullness of his Spirit. The term *hand* manifests power. The Father gives him power that he may dispose of it as he wishes. The term *hand* is also used to manifest distribution. The Father gives his Son the whole treasure of his mysteries, truths and graces, to distribute them to people. But what is the powerful hand of the Son of God, by which he distributes all these great treasures to all creatures? It is his sacred humanity by means of which alone we receive all these testimonies, lights and divine graces. The Father loves his Son and has placed everything in his wonderful hand. This hand gives witness, it transmits divine truths, gives graces, rewards faithful souls and will strike and exterminate the unfaithful because it is established judge of the living and the dead.

We can also see the mystery of the Blessed Trinity in these words: 'the Father loves the Son'. The love of the Father for the Son is nothing less than the Holy Spirit. This is the mission of the Son of God upon earth, to transmit his word to people: 'He whom the Father has sent speaks the word of God'. The gifts and operations of grace which affect souls and make them receive these words are operations attributed to the Holy Spirit; our Lord imparts this Holy Spirit, of which he has the fullness. '...it is not by measure that he gives...' (cf preceding verse). This communication is accomplished through the Word united to the sacred humanity. This is why St John speaks of the fullness of the Holy Spirit that has been given. And he adds the reason for the full presence of the Holy Spirit being in the word proclaimed and communicated by the Son of man. The Word receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit from his Father; the Father loves the Son from all eternity with this substantial love. This is the essential relation which makes the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father and the Son. And this whole divine essence has been placed in his hand, that is, in his sacred humanity, through the hypostatic union with the Word, to be distributed to people. Everything the Word receives

from the Father is attributed and belongs to the Son of man, and the Son of man imparts it to his brothers and sisters according to the capacity of each.

**36.** Qui credit in Filium habet vitam aeternam: qui autem incredulus est Filio, non videbit vitam, sed ira Dei manet super eum.

**36.** *He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.*

This is why those who believe in the Son, who cling to him and are united to him by faith, have eternal life. Our Lord does not say 'will have' but 'has', because those who are thus united with the Son possess through faith all that is in the Son and the Son imparts to them all that his Father gives him. Hence he makes them share in the eternal life he has in himself already in this world, although in a way inferior to sharing in glory. But people who do not believe in the Son, who refuse to believe that he is the Son of God and reject the testimony the Son gives about what he has seen in the bosom of his Father, such people will not see life. They certainly have not that life within them at this moment. They will not see him, that is, they will not possess him as long as they remain in that state, for the first necessary condition for having sins remitted is to believe. Those whose sins are not remitted will not see life; God's wrath will remain on them. It does so already because they are covered in sins. Since they do not believe they will not be able to avoid God's anger, for there is no means of avoiding that wrath other than to believe in the Son of God.

Note that he says first: 'he who believes in the Son' (...has eternal life - ed): i.e. he possesses the perfection of faith required to participate in our Lord's life. On the other hand he says: 'he who does not believe in the Son [(obey the son - RSV)... shall not see life' - ed.]; for this is only about the remission of sins, for which practical faith is not required, as was said above.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Conversation with the woman at the well of Sychar*

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| 1. Ut ergo cognovit Jesus quia audierunt phariseae quod Jesus plures discipulos facit, et baptizat quam Joannes, | 1. <i>Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John</i> |
| 2. (quanquam Jesus non baptizaret, sed discipuli ejus),  | 2. <i>(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),</i>  |
| 3. reliquit Judaeam, et abiit iterum in Galilaeam.   | 3. <i>he left Judea and departed again to Galilee.</i>   |

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were already jealous of John, despite the high esteem in which they were obliged to hold him. He knew what was taking place in their hearts and all the ideas they would have later. Knowing, therefore, that the Pharisees would be even more jealous of the glory and great reputation he himself was to acquire, he withdrew into Galilee as soon as the Pharisees found out that he had more disciples already at the start than John the Baptist had at the end.

Our Lord desired the salvation of these proud unfortunate men. That is why he dealt tactfully with them in the beginning. He withdrew in order not to give an occasion to their pride to resist grace from the beginning, so as to save them later on. This is always the line God takes. He gives us preparatory graces which we ought to correspond with even though he foresees that we shall be unfaithful — so great is his goodness and compassion towards sinners. By this line of action our Lord also provides his ministers with a lesson. We must know how to yield to circumstances and sometimes leave a good work undone to prevent evil. So also when people oppose a certain work

we must sometimes yield for a while to return subsequently.

Galilee was a less brilliant theatre of activity and far from Jerusalem. There the fears and jealousies of the Pharisees found fewer occasions to be aroused. The evangelist adds: 'although Jesus did not baptize'. The disciples baptised in water and our Lord conferred the Holy Spirit; the disciples carried out the sign, but the reality, which was the baptism of the Holy Spirit, was conferred by the Master; the disciples baptised in Our Lord's name. It follows that it was our Lord's baptism. We can truthfully say our Lord baptised. He really baptised although he used the disciples for the rites of the sacrament.

The apostles would act in the same way later on: they would proclaim the gospel, confer the Holy Spirit by Confirmation after Baptism — they would baptise through their disciples. 'He did not send me to baptize', said St Paul, 'but to preach the gospel' (1 Cor 1:17). Our Lord wanted to show that Baptism was not an essential ministry for the apostles, who would replace him on earth one day, but that they could have it done through their priests and other disciples.

4. Oportebat autem eum  
transire per Samariam.

4. *He had to pass through  
Samaria.*

He had to pass through Samaria; it was an order from his Father; it obliged him. There were people living there whose names were written in the eternal decrees, who were to receive the divine light at this moment. Jesus constantly scrutinised the things willed by his Father, all moves he made were controlled by the Father's wishes. Likewise he saw the whole order and sequence of events conducted by divine providence, so that his Father's eternal plan for souls might be accomplished; and so he directed his steps towards Galilee by way of Samaria.

It is marvellous to see how divine providence arranges circumstances in order to carry out its plans for the salvation of souls. There is no need for us, then, to be over concerned for the

salvation of souls. He who predetermined the graces he wills to bestow on them has determined also the times and circumstances; and he will arrange series of events to execute his designs. We have merely to follow our Lord's example in this, being faithful in doing what depends on us and aiding divine providence according to the circumstances it offers.

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| <p>5. Venit ergo in civitatem<br/>Samariae quae dicitur<br/>Sichar, juxta praedium<br/>quod dedit Jacob Joseph<br/>filio suo.</p> | <p>5. <i>So he came to a city of<br/>Samaria, called Sychar,<br/>near the field that Jacob<br/>gave to his son Joseph.</i></p> |
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The donation Jacob made to Joseph is a figure of the gift the Father made to his Son of all these countries, for Joseph was one of the great figures who foreshadowed our Lord. The true Joseph thus came at the moment the true donation by his Father was to be granted, and now he went to take possession of it. That is why our Lord stopped near this field, to show the figure accomplished in reality.

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| <p>6. Erat autem ibi fons Jacob.<br/>Jesus ergo fatigatus ex itinere,<br/>sedebat sic supra fontem.<br/>Hora erat quasi<br/>sexta.</p> | <p>6. <i>Jacob's well was there, and<br/>so Jesus, wearied as he<br/>was with his journey, sat<br/>down beside the well. It<br/>was about the sixth hour.</i></p> |
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In this field Jacob also gave Joseph a well to signify the divine graces that would flow over that country and the great source of the saving water of grace which the Father would give so that all might come and draw. It was a well, and not a flowing spring, which irrigates the country by itself; this was meant to show that when the divine spring arrived not all the inhabitants of the country would drink of it, but only those who came to draw. The well was very deep, according to the Samaritan woman (verse 11); it indicated



the time of the Old Testament, when it was difficult to reach the source of life which would appear later in that country and smooth out all difficulties, pouring forth (living water) plentifully for those who would come to draw. The well was deep before our Lord arrived.

'It was about the sixth hour'. It was during the month of April or near it, for it was four months before the harvest, as we are told later on. The sixth hour, or midday, is a figure of the light and heat which the sun of justice was beginning to spread profusely. The source of living water does not remain at the bottom of the well; it is no longer so far away nor so difficult of access but comes within the reach of all who wish to draw.

'He sat down beside the well'. Jesus sat beside it to manifest that he is the true spring and that the figure which foreshadows must henceforth disappear to give way to the truth. Jesus' tiredness may signify what he experienced in the labours that his members — during the whole period of the Old Testament — were obliged to undertake to reach the source of life. And this rest he took can represent rest for the souls he would possess in the New Testament. The latter no longer have to use manifold painful practices to reach him; they rest with him and as they drink from his living waters are refreshed from the fatigues of a natural life and the inclinations of the flesh. The evangelist thus calls the Old Testament and its laborious practices a 'journey', 'being tired from the journey'; for in fact the Old Testament was only a temporary useless way in itself by which to go further towards the future Messiah. For, as we are told by St Paul, the former people did not please God by their practices but by faith; consequently, the practices were a path that had no reality (cf Gal 2:16 f.).

The tiredness from the journey can also be explained as representing the sufferings our Lord experiences from the fact that souls keep their distance from him, do not want to come to him or even are unable to because of the entanglements of their evil affections and the great weakness of their wills. Our Lord has to run after them to look for them, and it is the tiredness he wishes to manifest.

He rests on the edge of the fountain. He is consoled because of the grace he will pour into a multitude of souls whom he foresees will be faithful in having recourse to him. His Father will draw them to him, when he has run after them and sought them out. However, our Lord's tiredness from his journey on foot was real. He could have prevented any tiredness for it depended entirely on himself to be worn out or not. But in this instance he desired to experience weakness, in order to use it to accomplish his Father's designs for the Samaritan woman. He knew she would come to the well at that time, as he knew perfectly all that the Father had providentially willed. This is why he was tired — so that he could take a rest near the well, receive the poor woman and make use of the well to speak of heavenly things for her salvation.

The fatigue was of infinite value in his Father's eyes, to merit for this woman the grace of conversion from all her sins. We observe wonderful goodness throughout the chain of happenings that furthers the salvation of this soul. Our Lord had to arrive at the sixth hour, the time when the apostles were to go shopping for food. And through his extraordinary mercy he inspired all his apostles to go away; not one remained; this made his conversation with the sinful woman easier. He could ask for water and then say what he had to say.

7. Venit mulier de Samaria  
haurire aquam, Dicit ei  
Jesus: Da mihi bibere.

7. *There came a woman of  
Samaria to draw water.  
Jesus said to her, "Give me  
a drink."*

8. (Discipuli enim ejus  
abierant in civitatem  
ut cibos emerent.)

8. *For his disciples had gone away  
into the city to buy food.*

A Samaritan woman now came to the well to draw water. Divine providence brought her there just then for her salvation. Although she was a woman and a Samaritan, our Lord did not consider it inap-

propriate to speak to her, to enter into spiritual conversation and teach her divine doctrine. This is remarkable. Our adorable Master was more willing to announce eternal truths to this poor woman degraded by sin, who was decried by her own people, a stranger despised by the Jews as a Samaritan, than to Nicodemus, a pious Jew, a doctor of the law and a prince of the people, who had come, nevertheless, with good intentions. He spoke to her more clearly and directly than to the doctor of the law.

Jesus, my most adorable Lord, I too am wretched, despicable in the eyes of everyone and of all your creatures. I too wish to draw water, but heavenly water from the fountain of my most gentle Saviour. Reveal yourself also to me and teach me what I must do to be pleasing in your eyes and in the eyes of your heavenly Father.

How different is the wisdom of the cross from the wisdom of the world! If the Pharisees had seen and heard what took place on this occasion, they would have noticed much to find fault with and criticise in the behaviour of eternal Wisdom. It is easy to see that divine Wisdom desires solemnly to condemn human wisdom, which prefers what is great to what is small and judges everything contrariwise to the Son of God.

Jesus wanted to open a conversation with the poor woman, introducing the subject he had in mind to talk about, similar in a way to the object of his request — some water to drink. He had no need to drink or eat; those needs arose only when he invited them. His need of a drink was not so urgent that he had to ask this woman for it in the absence of his Apostles. He could drink living water issuing from the eternal fountain of his Father, but he wanted to save this woman and many along with her; that is why he made the request.

But what was this thirst? There was a hidden meaning under his words, which the poor woman did not understand. Jesus thirsted for that unfortunate soul. He ardently desired to draw her to himself, to unite her to himself by faith and divine love, just as a human being who is thirsty draws water to quench his thirst. His thirst was also to accomplish his Father's will and he asks the woman to give him a drink, to yield to the interior solicitations of his divine Spirit, so that



the Son might accomplish his Father's adorable will for her salvation.

9. Dicit ergo ei mulier illa  
Samaritana: Quomodo tu,  
Judaeus quum sis, bibere a  
me poscis, quae sum mulier  
Samaritana? non enim  
couthuntur Judaei Samaritanis.

9. *The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*

The Samaritan woman, imbued with all the hatred and opposition of her people towards the Jews, was not in a hurry to give him a drink of water. But she said in astonishment: How can you, who are a Jew, ask water from a Samaritan woman? She spoke in a tone of displeasure. She said this because the Jews refused to have any dealings with the Samaritans, whom they looked on as heretics. The Samaritans did not accept the traditions and kept strictly to the letter of the law; they had a temple on Mount Garizim, and did not come to offer sacrifice in Jerusalem.

We note the same thing happening as in the conversation with Nathanael. The woman was full of prejudice and uneasiness towards our Lord for the simple reason that he was a Jew; she answered him bluntly, without saying 'Sir' at the beginning of her words. But our most gentle Lord spoke to her with the same goodness as he used towards Nathanael, or perhaps even greater. He continued to speak with her, especially in her heart, touching her with his grace, and finally drawing her to himself.

10. Respondit Jesus, et dixit ei:  
Si scires donum Dei, et  
quis est qui dicit tibi:  
Da mihi bibere, tu forsitan  
petisses ab eo, et dedisset  
tibi aquam vivam.

10. *Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."*

Jesus, full of compassion towards this woman and burning with thirst to win her, answered her hurtful question, both prejudiced and insulting, and reinforced by her refusal to give him a drink of water. 'If you knew the gift of God which is found in me and which I offer you, if you knew who it is who asks you for a drink, you would not play with those prejudices. You would realise that it is not because of a natural thirst to drink water that he says these things. He himself is the fountain of living water, and he merely requests a drink in order that he may fill you with the gift of God which he has received for you from his heavenly Father. If you knew that, perhaps you yourself would ask him for a drink and he would assuredly give you living water'.

If the meaning of our Lord's first request is that he asked a spiritual favour, namely, that she would give him her soul because of his burning thirst to fill her with grace and give her to his heavenly Father, then we can say our Lord now speaks to her again in the same sense. This time, however, he explained things a little more, so that her soul might gradually discern the truth; for she had always lived far away from God, uninformed about spiritual things: 'If you knew the gift of God that is offered you by what I have said; if you knew who he is who makes this request, namely, the omnipotent Son of the Father, perhaps you yourself would have asked for the drink, you would have felt the burning desires of a soul that surrenders to me in extreme thirst and longing. You might have asked me for the gifts and graces whose value you appreciated, you might have known them to be within me as their source, and I for my part would have filled you with them'.

Note that our Lord said 'perhaps' (not in RSV —ed.) concerning the request that the woman might have made but he affirmed with certainty that her request would have been granted. Our Lord's love for us is incomprehensibly greater than the love we have for ourselves. It is not certain that we shall ask, but it is certain that we shall receive as soon as we do. But for what reason did our Lord use a tone of uncertainty with the Samaritan woman about whether she should have made a request, when he knew for cer-

tain? This doubt does not reflect on our Lord but on the nature of things, namely, the condition of souls. He did not say: 'I do not know whether...', but he said 'perhaps...' The 'perhaps' refers to the Samaritan's actions. As far as she was concerned the request was uncertain, even supposing that she knew the gift of God and who he was who asked her for a drink.

To explain this we must remember that our Lord gives two kinds of graces to souls in order to draw them to himself, namely, graces of light for the mind and graces to warm and strengthen the will. The first kind are always accompanied by some graces to bear the will towards what is seen by the mind; thus it happens that a soul whose mind sees something feels prompted to pursue it.

But some souls are powerfully held back by the inclinations of their wills, they tend to earthly pleasures; such souls often resist the first grace of light in the mind. If God wants them he has to make a fresh onslaught on the will and impart a wealth of additional graces. This was the state of the Samaritan woman. She presented obstacles on both sides: in her mind were prejudice and unease, in her heart attachments to pleasure and evil habits. That is why the Lord said to her: 'If you knew the gift of God and who he is who asks you for a drink, you would not yield to prejudice and unease but would immediately be drawn to have recourse to him who is speaking to you'. For that very knowledge would have removed the obstacles in her mind. Nevertheless he said 'perhaps', because of the attachments found in her will; these had still to be fought and an out-pouring of divine grace would be needed. That further gift was forthcoming, as we see from the extreme goodness with which our Lord continued his discourse with her, and from the results his divine words produced.

11. Dicit ei mulier: Domine,  
neque in quo haurias habes,  
et puteus altus est; unde  
ergo habes aquam vivam?

11. *The woman said to him,  
"Sir, you have nothing to  
draw with, and the well is  
deep; where do you get  
that living water?"*



12. Numquid tu major es patre  
nostro Jacob, qui dedit  
nobis puteum, et ipse ex  
eo bibit, et filii ejus,  
et pecora ejus?

12. *Are you greater than our  
father Jacob, who gave us  
the well, and drank from  
it himself, and his sons,  
and his cattle?"*

According as he talked with the sinful woman our Lord touched her through his interior grace, gradually enlightening her. She began to have a glimpse of the truth, but it was so limited that she understood hardly anything our Lord said. However, she suspected that he had something supernatural to say, and the feelings of her heart must have told her a good deal. This is why she said: 'Lord, you have no bucket to enable you to draw water and the well is deep. So it is not from this well that you want to give me living water. Where then will you get the living water you want to give me? You must be talking about a miraculous water you desire to give me, without digging or going to any trouble. Are you greater than Jacob, who gave us this well by digging deep into the ground?'

We see a soul attentive to all our Lord's words, not failing to note any of the circumstances in which the divine words were spoken. She did not understand much, but we notice that a small light began to show; she realised that there was question of a miraculous water. So she said: 'Are you greater?' Her heart was touched, her prejudices (as a Samaritan against a Jew!) had collapsed. Now she spoke respectfully and with her heart's affection: 'Sir'. It appears also that something else had enlightened her; she seemed to realise that our Lord desired to give her this water out of disinterested love, without drinking of it himself. She began to see that he had asked her for a drink only in order to give her to drink. This is why she said in her astonishment that Jacob when giving them that well began by drinking from it himself, he and his children and his cattle.

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| <p><b>13.</b> Respondit Jesus, et dixit ei: Omnis qui bibit ex aqua hac, sitiet iterum; qui autem biberit ex aqua, quam ego dabo ei, non sitiet in aeternum;</p> | <p><b>13.</b> <i>Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again,</i><br/> <b>14a.</b> <i>but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst;</i></p> |
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After casting these first glimmers of truth into her mind and after making her soul more docile and attentive to his divine voice, our divine Master advances further diffusing the brilliant light of his grace. At the same time he gives her will an impetus to move forward energetically to that saving water he so greatly desired to give. Yet he still refrained from giving full clarity until she underwent a complete change, but he was disposing and preparing her for that perfect grace.

That is how divine wisdom gradually deals with souls, to have them come to the peak of his holiness and love. He gives a first grace we must be faithful to, and if we are, we receive a more perfect one; to the extent that we properly respond to these graces our divine benefactor proceeds until we have entered the sanctuary of his divine love. Then there is no more piecemeal giving. He gives and bestows himself with a generosity that surpasses all understanding. This is how he dealt with the Samaritan woman; as he progressed with her he enlightened her, constantly preparing her for further illumination. He said: 'anyone who drinks from that material water which was given to you by Jacob continues to thirst; but the living water which I give is not like that. Those who drink of the water I give experience no more thirst, not only in this world but for all eternity'.

To understand why our Lord so frequently uses the comparison of eating and drinking when he speaks of imparting grace, we must remember that our soul has nothing in itself to satisfy itself; it is like an empty vessel which can be filled only with things from outside it. God has created us like that in order to fill us himself and impart his own life and perfections to us, which, as St John says in one of

his letters, we shall enjoy one day most perfectly. 'We will be like him' (1 John 3:2), but even in this world we have this life through faith. Because of that our soul must tend Godwards with all its might. This is how we were created at the beginning, and throughout the time of innocence human beings enjoyed God that way; their lives were directed towards him and were entirely dependent on him. But sin broke the bond between God and humankind with the result that, instead of filling their soul with God and the divine beauty, human beings have wanted to be self-sufficient. This is emphasised by the tempter's words, 'You will be like gods', you will be self-sufficient. God withdrew and humans fell into a horrible void. The reason is that God created us to be in a state of complete dependence on him, with the whole extent of our being and powers; he made us with this need to satisfy our souls' hunger and thirst.

This need and void are perfectly represented by hunger, because our soul, which possesses nothing to feed and sustain itself, is in a state of extreme want and weakness. From the experience of that void, of that want, of that craving for something that will satisfy us, there is born a burning desire, an ardent tendency, towards some object that will satisfy us. This desire and tendency are compared with thirst which produces the same effects in the need for drink. From the time sin came to reside in our flesh, our soul no longer has that natural leaning towards God, to seek to satiate our hunger and slake the thirst of our desires. We seek to satisfy them in creatures or in our self-love, being misled by the senses and by the unruly appetites of our flesh.

But our Lord came and refashioned our union and relationship with God. He himself becomes the treasure and source of what can satiate our hunger and thirst, whereas natural things cannot satisfy them. They can offer only small consolation (if in fact they can be called consolation at all): pleasures for our senses, and for our imagination, riches and pride. All this does not help the soul; it does not touch it in any real way, to satisfy its hunger or quench its thirst. As soon as we receive these things which we thought would satisfy us, we hunger and thirst as before. This is what our Lord said



to the Samaritan woman: 'As for that material water of which you speak, which you received from Jacob, you drink it in vain; after a short while you will thirst again. From its inadequacy it represents the things of the earth. But those who drink the water I give will never thirst any more. This heavenly water will enter into their souls wholly permeating and refreshing them, consoling and satisfying them in all their needs, not only in this world but for all eternity.

This is stated in the following verse. Our Lord says that those who drink from the divine fountain of his grace will never thirst again; and yet the more grace and love a soul receives from him the more it will burn with the desire to love him. This is so true that the proof of a high degree of love in a soul is the presence of great desires to possess our Lord. But we must remember that there is a great difference between these two desires. The first is that of a soul that is empty and in want. Its ardour is one of anxious sorrow in its longing for the object it does not possess; its desire comes from the absence of the good and from its misery; its ardour comes from lack of refreshment, from want and inanition. That is real thirst with all its results.

The second desire is absolutely different. It is not caused by emptiness and want, it is not caused by wretchedness and the absence of the good. On the contrary, it is caused by what we might call the loving embrace of the good we possess. The soul sees its great beauty and wears itself out desiring it; the soul then already possesses this beauty and embraces it with inconceivable ardour and wants to enjoy it even more. But this unlimited enjoyment is reserved for eternity.

These desires, far from being painful, bring great pleasure and delight which are not imaginary but most real and substantial. And if at times these desires are painful, these pains themselves are so delightful that the soul would not give them up for all the joy of the world. That is why this kind of thirst is not like natural thirst, with all the various circumstances that accompany it. The only way it resembles physical thirst is in its intense desire for what will satisfy it; yet it is filled with happiness for it possesses what it desires already.

14. Sed aqua quam ego dabo  
ei, fiet in eo fons aquae  
salientis in vitam aeternam.

14b. *the water that I shall  
give him will become in  
him a spring of water  
welling up to eternal  
life."*

Our Lord now explains how the living water he gives to those who come to him quenches thirst unto eternity. The water of grace, which the divine Saviour places in our souls, becomes within us a spring that gushes forth unto life eternal. This grace becomes the source of our glory. Hence this latter water has two desirable qualities: first, it is living water for us while on earth, it refreshes and fills us here below; secondly, it becomes a source to drink from throughout all eternity. The divine graces our Lord imparts on earth become our very substance; by faith they impart our Lord's holiness, his virtues, his dispositions and his life; they make us sharers in his mysteries. All of these divine qualities of which our Lord is the great treasury are a sort of property belonging to our souls, which enjoy them already during this life. When the day of glory comes, these divine goods which our soul (in this life — ed.) possessed truly and authentically, which were its own substance hidden under the veil of faith, will then appear under a totally different aspect. The veil will fall away and the whole splendour of our Lord's glory will appear to us. This is how grace, which has a refreshing quality on earth, becomes the wonderful source of the life of glory. This very water which our Lord gives us here below will flow in great abundance and dazzling splendour for all eternity. It has made us similar to Jesus Christ on earth through grace; it will make of us other Christs in heaven by the splendour of his glory: 'the just will shine like the sun in the reign of their Father' (Mt 13:43). They will have the radiance of the very sun which will communicate that splendour, namely Jesus Christ himself.

15. Dicit ad eum mulier: Domine, da mihi hanc aquam, ut non sitiam, neque veniam huc haurire.
15. *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."*

The words our adorable Master had just uttered and the interior graces with which he accompanied them had the desired outcome. He did not yet wish to enlighten this poor soul perfectly; he merely wanted to put a certain pale light in her mind because she was not yet quite disposed or able to receive perfect light. Moreover he wanted to arouse her desires for this saving water, of whose beauty and excellence he was giving her only a glimpse. The woman was touched by these words and interior graces and began to have a loving desire for this water, which she realised was something extraordinary, although she still conceived things coarsely, thinking of quenching material thirst.

She said with an outpouring of love for our Lord: 'Lord, give me this water..'. The text says: 'she spoke with him', not simply 'she said to him' (*RSV* has 'said to him' — ed.); this expressed the affection of her heart. This love, however, was very imperfect, as were also her views and spiritual insights. Her wants showed self-interest, she was anxious to save herself pain. Yet her desire was not based on that but on the grace that touched her, mingled with a thought of self-interest.

The words, 'that I may not... come here to draw', show how unclearly she understood what he said. Yet such words would be quite normal on the lips of people desiring to give themselves to our Lord but still attached to earthly pleasures. They strongly desire to be disentangled from these pleasures and enjoy divine grace. So they say to our Lord: 'Lord Jesus, give me this living water to satiate my soul, which, without this good, surrenders to its passions and seeks nourishment in worldly goods. I am always thirsty; and not having your divine water of grace I go and pursue the goods of this world. In these I seek pleasure. Lord, give me your living water that my passions may be satisfied and that I may



no longer draw upon the pleasures of earth'.

This, to a certain extent, may even have been what the Samaritan woman meant, but then only confusedly. She knew little about spiritual things; through inexperience she was not able to discern her interior and supernatural sentiments. So in spite of having a fundamentally spiritual desire, she expressed only what was coarser in her desire without being able to state the rest, which was too confused in her mind. We need but little knowledge of souls in the first movements of their conversion to know how their desires remain unknown to them and how often they express motives that are not true. Note also that she does not ask for 'some of that water' but 'this water'. Hers was a great thirst, an ardent desire. She wanted to be filled and was not satisfied with having just some.

16. Dicit ei Jesus: Vade, voca virum tuum, et veni huc.

16. *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."*

The Samaritan woman asked for heavenly waters with great affection of heart, but she was not yet sufficiently disposed to receive them. She was presently living in an occasion of sin, and in the responses of the two following verses our Lord would make her realise this and at the same time impress her by the miraculous knowledge he had of her life. She was sufficiently disposed to be impressed by the miracle. That is why our Lord said, 'Call your husband and come here', as if to say: 'If you can bring me your husband, I will give you both water' or on the other hand to make her realise that the man she was living with was not her husband.

Our divine Master is extraordinarily good towards sinners who are carried away by weakness into sin. He dealt tactfully with this poor woman and recalled her fault with wonderful mildness, that she might repent and confess it. He gives us a good lesson on the way to handle sinners.

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| 17. Respondit mulier, et dixit:<br>Non habeo virum. Dicit ei<br>Jesus: Bene dixisti, quia<br>non habeo virum. | 17. <i>The woman answered him,<br/>"I have no husband." Jesus<br/>said to her, "You are right<br/>in saying, 'I have no<br/>husband';</i> |
| 18. Quinque enim viros habuisti:<br>et nunc, quem habes, non est<br>tuus vir: hoc vere dixisti.               | 18. <i>for you have had five hus-<br/>bands, and he whom you now<br/>have is not your husband;<br/>this you said truly."</i>              |

The woman replied that she had no husband. In saying so she was not telling a lie, for although she was living with a man he was not her husband. She was living badly. She could have come with her so-called husband, for she did not know our Lord could read the secrets of our hearts, but she had remorse. It is probable also that our Lord, while questioning her, was interiorly inspiring her with good sentiments and encouraging her to change.

However, if her contrition had been perfect she would have confessed the fact and asked for pardon with tears, as Magdalene did. But this poor woman was still in a very imperfect condition and her understanding of spiritual things was poor. Nevertheless, our Lord's adorable presence, his words of grace, which always had an effect, his goodness beyond words and the consolation he was giving this poor soul to draw her to himself did indeed attract her to him. She could not know yet who he was nor understand his divine teaching very well. She was ashamed to make her dissolute life known to our Lord, so she merely said she had no husband. How little the poor woman knew about him who was speaking to her with so much goodness and love! She was beginning to repent. If she had confessed her sins humbling herself before him, she would have received torrents of love and complete pardon. But she was afraid she would meet the rigour of the Pharisees.

Adorable Jesus, I know well that this is not true! I have personally and wonderfully experienced the way of your goodness, your love,

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your gentleness and your tender compassion beyond all understanding towards the worst of sinners, such as I was. Oh Jesus! I want to open my heart to you, to confess my crimes and horrid wickedness. I want to be abashed in your presence, laid low with my face to the ground. Grant me, I beseech you, your holy and delightful love. I am sinner enough for you to grant me this holy favour.

Our Lord, while showing the woman her sin, touched her heart by his miraculous knowledge. This was to strengthen her faith; her soul in its coarseness needed that kind of special help. Our Lord reproached her for having had five husbands. Either these husbands had died one after another, and his reproach was for her incontinence for living with a man who was not her husband but probably another woman's. Or those five husbands were still alive and she had dismissed them one after another, as used to happen among corrupt peoples where the women as well as the men had the right to divorce. It could be that this right existed among the Samaritans. If so, the reproach was still deserved, for, even if she believed in good faith that a woman had such a right, there was evidently something bad in putting away five of them and after that living unmarried with a stranger who may have been the husband of another woman, as the term, 'he whom you now have', seems rather to indicate.

19. Dicit ei mulier: Domine,  
video, quia propheta es tu.

19. *The woman said to him,  
"Sir, I perceive that you  
are a prophet.*

20. Patres nostri in monte hoc  
adoraverunt, et vos dicitis  
quia Jerosolymis est locus  
ubi adorare oportet.

20. *Our fathers worshipped on  
this mountain; and you say  
that in Jerusalem is the place  
where men ought to  
worship."*

Our Lord's word produced faith in this soul but does not seem to have increased contrition for her sins. Certainly, later on these sentiments became as strong as was required, after this conversa-



tion with our Lord, to receive the Baptism of regeneration, and we may believe our Lord had this given to her during his stay at Sychar. Once regenerated, she became quite different from before.

She says: 'I perceive that you are a prophet'. This manifests the birth of faith, faith of mediocre vision. In similar circumstances Nathanael said to our Lord: 'You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel'. What a difference! But, after all, Nathanael was a good Israelite and thereby was already sufficiently disposed to receive the faith, for the Old Law was a preparation for the faith, while this woman was considered sinful even among Samaritans. She was crude and full of vice. That is why our Lord proceeded step by step with her to bring about her conversion with great gentleness.

However, since she now had faith and real confidence in our Lord's words, her mind turned immediately towards the big question which so greatly preoccupied the Samaritans and Jews. She desired to profit by this excellent occasion to find out for sure what was to be believed and done. So she said: 'Our fathers have always adored God on this mountain (namely Mount Garizim) and you Jews say that it is at Jerusalem we must adore'. These words show how full of respect she was for our Lord. She seems to apologise for worshipping God on Mount Garizim, because she realised that this was contrary to the tradition of the Jews. She rejects the fault of her ancestors and seems to say: 'our ancestors did that', and shows herself disposed to believe whatever our Lord would decide.

In all this she had but little instruction; she did not know truly what it meant to adore God, for the Samaritans had the spirit of the law even less than the Jews. They were more formal in the way they fulfilled their duties towards God; they thought all the value of their worship came from the place in which it was performed. When elsewhere they did not bother to offer worship and even in that venerated place what sort of adoration did they give? A few external rituals.

21. Dicit ei Jesus: Mulier,  
crede mihi, quia venit  
hora, quando neque in  
monte hoc, neque in  
Jerosolymis adorabitis  
Patrem.

21. *Jesus said to her, "Woman,  
believe me, the hour is  
coming when neither on  
this mountain nor in  
Jerusalem will you worship  
the Father.*

The woman's questions gave our Lord the occasion to instruct her in three truths: first, concerning the place to adore God; secondly, about knowing, in view of the differences in their religions, whether Samaritans or Jews possessed the truth. Although the woman brought up only the question of the correct place to worship, she nevertheless asked for instruction in all the other issues. She spoke only about the place because she mistakenly thought that this was the most important question. Thirdly, concerning the meaning of adoration itself, about which she had no exact idea. In this verse our Lord instructs the woman at the well on the first point. He shows her that one can adore God in any place, which is very true. 'A time will come', he said, 'When neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship...' Our Lord adopted a very solemn tone. He held her whole attention and needed to strengthen her faith in what he was about to say. 'Woman, believe me'. The reason was that this woman, as well as her whole people and the Jews also were so attached to their particular place for adoring God that they found it most extraordinary to hear the contrary; it would scandalise them greatly. That is why our Lord said: 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when...you will worship the Father...', and so on. This will happen either because those particular places will be destroyed and ruined or the law will be abolished after our Lord's death, and the Church, spread over the whole earth, will adore God in every place and offer him the pure spotless victim everywhere on earth.

22. Vos adoratis quod nescitis;  
nos adoramus quod  
scimus, quia salus ex  
Judaeis est.

22. *You worship what you do  
not know; we worship  
what we know, for  
salvation is from the Jews.*

Our Lord now instructs her on the second point, a direct answer to her question. 'The Jews are the chosen people, and you are not. The salvation of all peoples, hence even of your people, comes from the Jews. Therefore it is over them that divine providence has always watched to preserve the deposit of faith. All true traditions are found in them, whether about knowledge of God, duties towards God, or the way to fulfil them. Hence you adore what you do not know. You have not the true traditions; you have not the prophets. You have only the law, which you do not understand, because you have not the correct traditions about the Messiah, the only salvation of all peoples, in whom alone one can give God adoration. All the practices prescribed in the law are fulfilled in him. Since it was among us that salvation was to be born, God preserved in us the true traditions and all the foreshadowings of the Messiah, who brings that salvation. So we adore what we know'.

Although at the time our Lord spoke authentic tradition had indeed been obscured by the false traditions of the scribes and, although the prophets were not well understood by the Jewish people, nevertheless there was less ignorance among them than among the Samaritans. Besides, our Lord spoke in general concerning the great matter discussed between Samaritans and Jews, without deciding who was right here and now. He merely wanted to show that the Samaritans were on the wrong road and should not hold to their prejudices. Moreover, our Lord intended as well to direct the woman's mind toward the Messiah. She was now sufficiently disposed by the whole conversation for him to make himself known, as he would actually do at the end of his discourse.

23. Sed venit hora, et nunc est,  
quando veri adoratores ado-  
rabunt Patrem in spiritu et  
veritate; nam et Pater tales  
quaerit qui adorent eum.

23. *But the hour is coming,  
and now is, when the true  
worshippers will worship  
the Father in spirit and  
truth, for such the Father  
seeks to worship him.*



In this verse and the next our Lord gives the third instruction. The Samaritans did not even know what they adored. The Jews knew what they adored and did it in a better way, but all these acts of adoration were imperfect, to say the least. The Jews themselves adored God only by means of ritual practices which figured what was to come. Whatever good there was in such things consisted in the fact that they had a meaning; they represented the Messiah and the different mysteries of his life. True Israelites — without knowing how to explain them precisely — had an obscure image of what these were.

Moreover, these adorers were never really true adorers, because most of the time, at the very moment they were bringing their homage to God, they had all sorts of evil dispositions in their heart. More than that, even the best of them were not true adorers because they never knew how to adore in any other way than by ritual practices accompanied by some heartfelt sentiments. There were few chosen and extraordinary souls who put their whole heart into worship.

That is why our Lord said: 'Neither in this place nor at Jerusalem is God adored as he ought to be. But a time will come when the face of things will be changed. Then there will be true adorers, persons wholly devoted to my Father, entirely given to adoring my Father, who will forget and lose sight of all created things, renounce all human affection and natural desire, who will constantly practise self-abnegation, so as to become nothing before my Father in order that he alone may reign in them. Nothing will remain in them which tends to their own personal satisfaction or serves their interest or their own glory. Their souls with all their powers will be constantly prostrate before him and tend only towards him, in a spirit of submission and in the sole desire of his glory and reign over them. There you have true adorers, true adorers who will adore my Father in spirit and in truth. They will adore him *in spirit*, not by external practices nor even by feelings they might add to them. They will not go into a temple of stone merely to seek him there. They will consider him spiritually in their souls, as a king in his

palace and as a God in his temple. And there they will render him homage with the most inward powers of their hearts. They will prostrate, admit their nothingness before the sovereign Majesty, whom they will see living and reigning in them'.

However, our Lord did not want to condemn the practice of going by preference to adore in some place that was consecrated for that purpose, since the true worshippers of whom he spoke — the apostles and first disciples — constantly went to the temple to pray. What he condemns is an attitude, the purely superficial belief that religious ritual as such is the principal way of honouring the heavenly Father. They will adore *in truth*, that is, 'the fulfilment of their duties toward my Father will not consist in mere ideas or feelings, but in real profound commitment of their souls; they will be continually and perfectly submissive to my Father, considering as nothing all their own gifts and talents'.

We could also interpret *in spirit* as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Their adoration will be done in the Holy Spirit, as St Paul says, 'the Holy Spirit prays in us and cries out, my Father' (Gal 4:6). And *in truth* could mean to unite one's adoration with that of the Son of God: then it is done in the eternal truth of the Father. It is in thus adoring in the Holy Spirit and in union with the Son of God that our adoration is genuine, for every prayer and adoration not done in the Holy Spirit is not genuine. And so, true adorers are those who adore in the Holy Spirit.

These two explanations come to the same thing, for the sentiments and dispositions expressed by adoration and pointed out in the first explanation, could not exist practically without the grace of the Holy Spirit, through union with the Son, who thus produces his own sentiments and dispositions in us. After all, of ourselves we could never produce nor have perfect sentiments and dispositions; it is only through our Lord — the sovereign adorer of his Father — that we can possess them, by his divine Spirit.

'For my Father seeks these', Jesus says. 'Not only do they please him, but he seeks them.' Everything he did until now was only in

order to find those privileged souls. All the relations he had with people until now were for the purpose of finding in the end those who could adore him in spirit and in truth. He has found only a small number until now, but the hour will come when he will find some. However, it is not their merely natural selves he seeks. They have but little value before him in themselves; what he loves in them is the resemblance to his Son or, rather, the sentiments and dispositions which he finds in his Son's act of adoration of the Father. These are the things in which he takes delight and which he seeks. Our Lord says, 'he seeks such', not 'them'. 'Such' indicates a relation with the object spoken of. That is the most important thing and the true object of his search. The Father seeks those who honour within themselves his spirit and his truth, not for their own sake, but so that they may worship in that spirit and that truth.

24. Spiritus est Deus; et eos  
qui adorant eum, in spiritu  
et veritate oportet adorare.

24. *God is spirit, and those  
who worship him must  
worship in spirit and  
truth."*

Adoration is a relationship of our soul with its God as with its Creator, a relationship by which it renders him what belongs to him. Now God is a spirit, so relationship with him must not be based on external practices, nor on the senses, but spiritual attitudes. For every relationship with God supposes union with him, that is the union of the creature with its Creator in a way which befits its status as a creature. Such union results in adoration. To have union with a pure spirit, the contact must be spiritual. In animals there is nothing spiritual, they cannot have a spiritual relationship with God, nor render him service. This is possible only to angelic and human nature. These God has created with a spirit made in his image and likeness, so that they may have a relationship with him and honour him by adoring him. Hence adoration must issue from the soul and dwell only there.

If adoration must be in spirit, that is, rendered by the soul as a



duty to the Father, it must also be in truth. All the powers of the soul must take part in it, religiously submissive to God and devoted to him as a creature towards the Creator. God is a spirit; he has created us in order that we may adore him in spirit and in truth. This is the way it must be for he wants to be honoured in this way.

Here our Lord uses the word adoration to cover all kinds of contact human beings have with God because, in fact, adoration is involved in all the virtues of religion which lead us to God and unite us with him. Adoration encompasses them: it contains faith, which is its beginning; it contains hope, for without hope we could not lift our eyes Godwards or approach him; it contains charity, which is, as it were, its sap and flavour, for without it it would not be adoration but despair. The demons in hell have that despairing kind of adoration without virtue, homage, hope or charity. From this comes their rage; they cannot help recognising the sovereign greatness of God and their baseness before him, but they have no hope of enjoying that adorable greatness and they hate it mortally. 'They believe and tremble' (Jm 2:19).

Adoration must of necessity comprise these three virtues, which must be found in our soul so that its three powers may be united to him whom it adores. It also contains the three lower virtues which expel the three concupiscences from our soul. In adoring God our soul sees all riches in him and thereby comes to a renunciation of wealth. Our soul sees and places all its happiness in him and so renounces pleasure. Finally, the essential element in adoration is self-annihilation before God, as being nothing, and if we have sinned, as being sinners. Hence again, adoration demands the most perfect humility and the destruction of pride. Adoration, then, includes all the virtues of religion and all our duties towards God. This makes it clear how adoration in spirit is also in truth, as was said above. 'And now is'. That hour when God would be adored in spirit and in truth could come only under the new law and after the Incarnate Word had appeared on earth.

25. Dicit ei mulier: Scio quia  
Messias venit (qui dicitur  
Christus); cum ergo venerit  
ille, nobis annunciabit  
omnia.

25. *The woman said to him, "I  
know that Messiah is  
coming (he who is called  
Christ); when he comes, he  
will show us all things."*

The Samaritan woman did not fully understand all our Lord said. However, as in all the rest of the conversation, she caught a confused glimpse of it for her mind was well disposed, she was beginning to have an outlook of faith, docile and receptive. The only thing that prevented our Lord from communicating these truths with full clarity was her heart, which was not yet sufficiently pure, for her affections and sentiments were still worldly and unspiritual. She realised, however, that the hour when people would no longer adore at Jerusalem or on Mount Garizim, when they would adore in spirit and in truth, would be related to the Messiah. Her mind seemed to be vaguely struck by this. That is why she said to our Lord: 'You speak there about the Messiah; I know well he will come, and when he does he will explain everything, he will tell us what we have to do. And then, she seemed to say, we will do as he says. On this point our Lord spoke in the following verse:

26. Dicit ei Jesus: Ego sum  
qui loquor tecum.

26. *Jesus said to her, "I who  
speak to you am he."*

'I am the Messiah, I who am talking to you. You know that the Messiah will announce all these things, that he will teach you what to do. Well, do what I tell you and see things as I do, for I am the Messiah you are waiting for, I who am speaking with you. Do not await another, but act now according to the graces you have received'.

It is astonishing how our Lord loves and prefers simple people of docile spirit. Nicodemus was a good man, a faithful observer of the law, waiting for the redemption of Israel, whereas this woman was a sinful stranger and even belonged to a heretical sect, yet our Lord

gave this woman a more exact knowledge of his person. The reason was that he did not find as much simplicity and docility of spirit in Nicodemus as in her.

The word Messiah which is given to our Lord means *Christus*, from the Greek word for anointed, because of the perfect anointing of the Word in the sacred humanity. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is always represented by the emblem of oil mixed with balm and aromatics (this is already found in the Old Testament), because oil oozes out and penetrates gently and pleasantly into the objects over which it spreads to soften them smoothly. The balm and aromatics released through that unction give off a pleasant odour. So the Holy Spirit flows calmly, spreads and flows into souls, imparting the gentleness, smoothness and pleasing fragrance of all virtues. But where did that divine anointing of the Holy Spirit and at the same time of the divine Word ever take place more perfectly than in our Lord? That is why he is called the anointed par excellence. Moreover, he is the only anointed of God, all other anointings are only a share in his. He has the fullness; others who are anointed have only a portion. This is why he is called purely and simply the 'Anointed One'.

27. Et continuo venerunt discipuli ejus; et mirabantur quia cum muliere loquebatur. Nemo tamen dixit: Quid quaeris, aut quid loqueris cum ea?

27. *Just then his disciples came. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"*

Divine providence had kept the disciples at a distance to enable their divine Master instruct the poor woman. As soon as the last instruction was given, they immediately returned: 'just then'. Time had to be given for the woman's faith to focus on our Lord as the Messiah, then they could come back. The apostles were surprised to see our Lord holding conversation with a woman. Although there



was no danger in it — for him to talk with a woman was the same as to talk with a man — nevertheless he would use the greatest caution on this point, in order to give example to his disciples; for because of their weakness there was danger for them in becoming too familiar with a woman. The apostles, who were accustomed to notice the reserved conduct of their Master, were wondering this time that he made an exception to his usual way of acting. All the same, no one dared ask him what he had wanted of the woman, or why he had been speaking with her. They must have seen, however, that there was some extraordinary motive. They had such great respect for our Lord that sometimes they were shy, in spite of his mildness, goodness and the extraordinary interest he ceaselessly showed them. Besides the extreme gentleness, there was also the divinity, which dwelt corporeally in him, as St Paul says (Col 2:9); this had an effect on them all the time, although they had not always a clear idea of it. But if they did not dare to question our Lord himself — on seeing such an extraordinary thing — no doubt they did not fail to find out from the Samaritan woman at the first opportunity.

28. Reliquit ergo hydriam suam mulier, et abiit in civitatem, et dicit illis hominibus:

28. *So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people,*

29. Venite, et videte hominem qui dixit mihi omnia quaecumque feci: numquid ipse est Christus?

29. *"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"*

30. Exierunt ergo de civitate et veniebant ad eum.

30. *They went out of the city and were coming to him.*

Here we see the wonderful efficacy of the words of grace from our Lord's lips. Hardly had she heard this discourse — and in spite of her poor understanding — when the sinful woman became an

apostle. She had at once the same zeal as St Andrew and St Philip. She ran to proclaim the good news to the inhabitants of her country. So full and preoccupied was she that she left there at the well her water jar which she had brought to draw water. She was not physically thirsty anymore. The divine Redeemer had given her living water, which wells up into life eternal. She had drunk from that living water after which there is no more thirst. This little gesture shows that she must have had the same dispositions as the Apostles. She would have abandoned everything and followed our Lord, if he had called her like them. She was committed to him, and thought no more of earthly things.

She went to the town and told the people living there: Come, and meet this most extraordinary man; he has told me everything I have done. She was like all who find this divine treasure; they try their best to invite others to share their happiness. This is the result of God's charity acting in their souls; from it comes the effort and the burning desire to communicate their great happiness. The treasure is unlike earthly treasures. These make people selfish; if someone finds a goldmine he wants to enrich himself alone, leaving nothing for others, even though he may know beforehand that others will do him no wrong. Heavenly riches have a contrary effect; moreover, we are quite certain that we cannot lose them; the treasure is inexhaustible.

'Come and see!' Just see and you will be happy. All the marvels I tell you will not convince you as much as seeing. She thought to help them believe by the very thing that had impressed her, namely, the miracle which had aroused in her the beginnings of faith: 'see the man who has told me everything I have done'. And she added: 'Is he not the Messiah?' She did not dare to say directly: 'He is the Messiah', either because, being a poor local woman discredited by her conduct, she was afraid that her declaration would be rejected, or else because she knew the prejudices of her nation against the Jews.

She used her ingenuity, getting them to believe enough to come and see for themselves. And she felt sure that those who would go

and see would believe, for the faith of simple people has no doubts. She did not imagine that anything else was possible than to give into so much evidence, to the divine charm and supernatural grace of the Saviour's words. She did enough to arouse their curiosity and she was successful. The people left the town and arrived when the apostles had finished questioning our Lord and the divine Master had given them the answers related in the following verses: 'They went out...and were coming to him..'

31. Interea rogabant eum  
discipuli, dicentes: Rabbi,  
manduca.

31. *Meanwhile the disciples  
besought him, saying,  
"Rabbi, eat."*

32. Ille autem dicit eis: Ego  
cibum habeo manducare  
quem vos nescitis.

32. *But he said to them: "I  
have food to eat of which  
you do not know."*

33. Dicebant ergo discipuli ad  
invicem: Numquid aliquis  
attulit ei manducare?

33. *So the disciples said to  
one another, "Has any one  
brought him food?"*

One might have thought that the incarnate Son of God should be exempt from the need to eat and drink. But as he had become man for the purpose of sanctifying human beings it was proper that he should subject his sacred humanity to the need to eat, drink and sleep so as to sanctify all such actions to which we are subject, that we might sanctify them through his example. But each one of these actions — so common and indifferent in itself — was performed by the Son of God in a most holy way. Moreover, in general, all these actions of his contained innumerable graces for us, in order that we might act in as saintly a fashion as the Son of God.

Although our Lord willed to submit to these earthly experiences so much beneath him, nevertheless he submitted to them only because he willed it and according to the way he willed it. He willed to be thirsty so as to give the Samaritan woman living and life-giv-



ing water to drink. He sent his apostles to go and buy him food, in order to give them the divine lesson we are about to hear. When they came and wanted to offer him what they had bought, he no longer wanted it; he had another repast to take. He wished to be like us in all things (except sin) that we might have a high priest who was able to sympathise with our troubles, having to a great extent experienced them himself (cf Heb 4:15). When the disciples had offered him something to eat, he said: 'I have other food to take which you do not know, a food much more pleasing than what you give me there'. This is the food he was taking constantly, whereas he partook of food for the body only at intervals; and then he did it only according to his Father's will. The apostles did not yet know this divine food which our Lord had to take, for they were scarcely yet enlightened about the life of the Son of God. That is why they thought that someone else might have brought him earthly food while they were away.

34. Dicit eis Jesus: Meus cibus  
est ut faciam voluntatem  
ejus qui misit me, ut  
perficiam opus ejus.

34. *Jesus said to them, "My  
food is to do the will of  
him who sent me, and to  
accomplish his work.*

Our Lord then explained the repast he had taken. This, he said, was his only true meal, bodily food being only an accessory for him. His true repast and the food proper to him was that he should do his Father's will. 'My food is' does not mean: for this occasion I have had this food, but indicates that he was in the habit of taking it. We can say that our Lord wanted to show that he does not attach great importance to meals. His food is more than bodily food, more pleasing than food usually is to the palate, more necessary than food usually is for the body. His food is doing the will of his Father who sent him. He must accomplish the task for which he was sent. He said this at this moment because of the Samaritans who were going to come; they had to be converted; they had to receive the faith. He thus gave his ministers who were to continue his work a good example to

arouse their zeal. When it is a question of saving souls, the whole of nature must be neglected; their souls should seek that exceptionally fine food which consists in doing the will of him who sent them and completing his work in souls.

There is another explanation. The heavenly bread our Lord received was his Father's will. This will was a substantial bread, given for all the works he had to perform and for each of his actions. Our adorable Lord acted to accomplish that adorable will perfectly and completely. Because of his divinity he corresponded perfectly with the Father's will and thus he made it his 'food'. Here he compares this will with our food. Just as by the activity of our organs we reduce food into a vital substance to distribute to all the parts of our body, likewise our Lord, by acting in fidelity to the divine will draws spiritual sustenance from it as one does from earthly food. In doing this he makes of it a store of his grace and merit which he then distributes to his whole body, that is, to souls.

That is why he says: 'My food is', my principal existence is a spiritual existence and I have to nourish myself with my spiritual and mystical food. That is why my food is to do the will of him who sent me. He does not say, 'my Father's will', but that of him who sent me; he wants to show that his whole mission consists in that. His Father has sent him only in order to form this store of grace and infinite merit. This treasure and vital substance he must build up by the food he eats, 'to accomplish his work', to perfect, to achieve, to fulfil the work of his Father, who sent him for this purpose. And this work is to communicate to all souls the vital substance he has formed in himself by doing his Father's will and forming thereby the body of the elect, that is, the perfect Church, which is to last for all eternity. This is truly his mystical body to which he imparts the divine life of glory with marvellous profusion.

There we have the final end his Father proposes: 'All for the sake of the elect' (cf 2 Tim 2:10). Even the graces and other goods granted to souls who are in the Church on earth and even offered to wicked people who are outside the Church: all this is for forming them to be the elect. If they are not, it is their own fault. The Son of

God has always perfected the work of him who sent him, having imparted to each one the graces his Father predestined for them. They simply have not willed to profit by them. So our Lord said to the apostles: 'You want me to take food for the body, which has very little importance for me and is not my true food just at the moment when I must take my customary food. This is as necessary for me as it is for other people to take earthly food at the proper time'. The time had come to take this food because his Father wanted him to lead the Samaritans to life at this particular moment. He said, 'will' and not 'wills', in the plural because the divine will dwelt in him in its essence — there was only one divine will.

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| <p><b>35.</b> Nonne vos dicitis, quod adhuc quatuor menses sunt, et messis venit? Ecce dico vobis: Levate oculos vestros, et videte regiones, quia albae sunt jam ad messem.</p> | <p><b>35.</b> <i>"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?' I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest.</i></p> |
| <p><b>36.</b> Et qui metit, mercedem accipit, et congregat fructum in vitam aeternam: ut et qui seminat, simul gaudeat, et qui metit.</p>  | <p><b>36.</b> <i>He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.</i></p>  |
| <p><b>37.</b> In hoc enim est verbum verum; qui alius est qui seminat, et alius est qui metit.</p>   | <p><b>37.</b> <i>For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'</i></p>  |
| <p><b>38.</b> Ego misi vos metere quod vos non laborastis; alii laboraverunt, et vos in labores eorum introistis.</p>  | <p><b>38.</b> <i>I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."</i></p>                                       |



On the occasion of the Samaritans coming to receive the faith, Our Lord exhorts the apostles to have apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls and to adopt the sentiments which he had expressed in the previous verse. It seems he had already told them for what task they were destined; here he inspires them with the spirit of their mission. Our Lord compares the ministry of the apostolate to a harvesting. The apostles were the reapers. The Church which he was to found he compared to the place where one gathers the corn, and the souls are the corn. Moses, the prophets, St John the Baptist and all those who worked in the Lord's field before he came to earth, are compared to the labourers who work to prepare the soil and do whatever is necessary to make corn grow and ripen. He who sows is our Lord himself; he sows grace within people, for he alone can cast the wonderful seed. All the people of the Old Testament could only labour and give nothing. St John the Baptist confessed he was powerless and that everything he had came from the superabundance of the Lamb of God.

This then is what our Lord said: 'Do you not say there is still more time before the harvest? The corn is still green. Four more months are still needed to make it ready for cutting. You probably think that the time for forming the Church and making people enter is not near. Lift up your eyes and see how well the souls are already disposed, how greatly the seed of grace has already grown. As the corn that is already white and dry can no longer expect to get further growth from the soil in which it is planted and asks only to be cut down and carried off to a barn, so do people avidly receive the faith. The Old Law is no longer of use to them; they must be taken out of it and put into the Church. There they will be cleansed. There they will be freed of the straw and of all dross so that the one who has sown them may rejoice in them'.

These words were meant to exhort the apostles to zeal and to prepare themselves more and more for the great work which was waiting for them, which they would begin to undertake very

soon. To inspire them even more he added: 'He who reaps has his reward. He does not reap his own field, but the Father of the family will give him his reward; and in reaping — in gathering the fruits into the great barn of him who has sown — the reaper gathers fruits for himself for eternal life. So it is with the harvest; the harvesting lasts only a short time; food is then gathered for the whole year. It is the time of labour, and the remainder of the year is the time of repose. Likewise with the harvest of the holy gospel. The work lasts only during the present life, and the reapers enjoy its fruits during the rest which is eternal. Although the fruit does not belong to the reaper, nevertheless he enjoys it with the father of the family for all eternity'.

Here our Lord shows the greatness of apostolic grace; apostolic labours and graces produce a fruit of sanctification for those who are employed in that work. They share with the sower in all the fruits the seed has produced, so that he who has sown it, namely our Lord Jesus Christ, may rejoice with his reapers. They have shared in his labours, they have shared in the work of redemption. They will also have a share in the glory of that redemption for all eternity. What greatness the apostles have! This is what our Lord says elsewhere in different terms: 'They will be seated on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel' (Lk 22:30). He added: 'For in this is the word of truth. In the original of the comparison, he who reaps is usually the same as he who sows and the fruits belong to him. By the mysterious harvest, he who reaps is other than he who sows. The harvest does not belong to the reaper'.

We could also say that our Lord expresses another truth in these words. He sent the apostles to gather the harvest, but it was certainly the Holy Spirit who was reaping through them. The apostles were the reapers, or rather, they were the arms of him who was the reaper. For it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that they reaped and gathered fruits into the barns of the Church of God. Their reward must nevertheless be that of reapers. This then is what our divine Master means here: the

words are true. In this parable I give you there is a word of truth. All the rest is only a symbol or a shell, containing the great truth. The word of truth, which is fundamental in the mystery, is that he who sows is not the same as he who reaps'. He who sows is the Son of God, the Incarnate Word; it is he who merits and imparts the seed of grace in each soul. The one who reaps is different — the Holy Spirit. For the Church was formed only after the completion of all the mysteries of our Lord and after the descent of the Holy Spirit, who was to consummate the work of sanctifying souls. He is the light and strength of the apostles, the power of all their words. It is he who touches souls, who draws them, who is the life imparted by the sacraments, which bring people into the Church and sanctify them.

Our Lord attributes to himself the sending of missionaries since he sends the Holy Spirit and merited him. Our Lord merited him and sent him but the divine Spirit consummates the work and is the true harvester. That is why our Lord speaks only in the singular in all this part, as of one harvester.

Our Lord says 'he who sows' in the present tense as also 'he who reaps'. Now how can this be? If the moment he speaks of is the time of the harvesting, then the time of sowing the seed is past. If he means the time of sowing the seed, then the time for reaping has not yet arrived. But our Lord is speaking in general of all periods of the Church. For all the ages the Church will last our Lord will sow and will get the harvest reaped; the time for sowing and the time for reaping will always fall together.

Having shown the apostles how excellent their apostolic ministry was from what their reward would be and from their relationship with himself and with his Holy Spirit, Jesus shows them as the following verse relates — the connection between themselves and the labourers who worked in the field before them: 'Others have laboured, have prepared everything, have done burdensome work and have not seen the fruits; all those whom the Father of the family sent for that purpose were under the law. But you I send simply to do the harvesting; all those labours were



finished by others. You have now entered on your new vocation into that work in order to gather the fruits they prepared'.

But why does our Lord say: 'I have sent you...you have entered into' as if the deed had already been done? It might be because their vocation had been already announced; as if they were already following our Lord and evangelising having left everything. It might also be that these words were said on an occasion other than where the evangelist places them here, because they came appropriately after the other words, 'My food...' Our Lord could have said them most appropriately when the apostles had returned from the preaching mission on which he had sent them. But since the evangelist was not going to record that event, he recorded the words, words which are recorded by other evangelists.

The evangelist in that case would be giving us an instruction which the other Gospels give silently in the same way. He would teach us that it is of very little importance to know the time, place and circumstances when the words were spoken or the events took place. All our attention should be given to letting the divine words penetrate deeply into us and meditating on the mysteries accomplished. All this must be done for the sanctification of our souls, to get to know our divine Master and his holy mysteries; it must not be a yielding to a curiosity that wants to seek and know things which are only secondary and are basically unimportant for knowing our Lord and sanctifying our souls. Only when such information can truly edify us and procure spiritual benefit should we follow it up religiously in our Lord's grace.

39. Ex civitate autem illa multi crediderunt in eum Samaritanorum, propter verbum mulieris testimonium perhibentis: Quia dixit mihi omnia quaecumque feci.

39. *Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."*

People who sin only through ignorance and who have no malice in their minds are quite easy to convert as they have a facility for acquiring the faith, whereas those who are maliciously corrupt and whose spirit is proud prevent grace from coming into their souls. That is why the Samaritans, who paid less attention to the Law and were farther away from God than the Jews, believed the words of a poor sinful woman, simply because she reported having witnessed one single miracle. On the other hand our Lord was unable to find believers in spite of constantly travelling through Judea and Galilee, lavishing miracles and his divine word. Why did the Jews have this great misfortune? Whence so much malice and blindness? The reason was they had made ill use of God's many favours and he allowed them to fall into total blindness.

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| 40. Cum venissent ergo ad illum Samaritani, rogaverunt eum ut ibi maneret. Et mansit ibi duos dies.                                    | 40. <i>So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.</i>   |
| 41. Et multo plures crediderunt in eum propter sermonem ejus.  | 41. <i>And many more believed because of his word.</i>   |
| 42. et mulieri dicebant: Quia jam non propter tuam loquelam credimus; ipsi enim audivimus, et scimus quia hic est vere Salvator mundi. | 42. <i>They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."</i> |

It is said in another place by our Lord himself: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' (Rev. 3:20). Jesus in his divine goodness does not wait until sinners finally knock at his door; he takes the initiative of knocking at the door, and blessed are those who open

to him. For the divine Master enters, eats the bread of this world's sorrows and troubles with them and gives them also to eat with himself the bread of his love, happiness and strength.

This is what happened to the poor Samaritans. They had lived in wretchedness and darkness. The Jews, who could have given them a portion of the little glimmer of light they had, looked down on them. The Saviour came to knock at their door and he used this poor woman to get his voice heard. The Samaritans were faithful to this first grace, they were thirsting for a happiness to which they did not know they had been called; desirous of seeing and hearing him who was knocking, they opened their door with eager joy. They came immediately and asked him to do them the favour of staying, and the divine Master remained in that place two days.

How many graces, blessings and consolations our Lord poured out during that time! His word is so powerful that no heart ever resists it when the person is well disposed and has a simple humble attitude of mind; the effects produced are always wonderful. Even evil persons who strenuously resist will always experience something or other from these words. The ministers of our great Master must not deceive themselves. If their words were pure and holy, if their words were not their own but their Master's, if they did not say a lot of simply human things, and even faulty things out of vanity, if they received the divine word from their Master's lips and then transmitted it as he gave it without dressing it up in a worldly way that disfigures it, they could be sure that from their lips their Master's divine word would produce the same prodigies as it did from his.

The Samaritans were not led to believe by miracle; it was through the power of our Lord's word: 'because of his word'. And the faith they acquired by the divine word of Jesus was much more perfect, penetrating and firm than that produced by the miracle story; it was also clearer. That is why they said to the woman: 'Now it is no longer because of what you told us that we believe, it is no longer the same faith we have now. The faith we



now have has quite a different intensity of light, more certainty than the first. We ourselves have heard his heavenly teaching and from this hearing faith has penetrated our souls. It has filled us with joy and consolation and it has so greatly enlightened our minds that we know now for certain that he is truly the Saviour of the world'.

What a wonderful enlightenment these worthy Samaritans already had about the person of our Lord! The Jews expected a conquering Messiah, who would deliver them from the yoke of the Romans and make them triumph and reign over all peoples. All the law and the prophets, all their traditions — so clear in themselves — were unable to enlighten them on this point. The Saviour had been preaching among them for more than two months. St John the Baptist had gone before him, but nothing could enlighten them about the person of their Messiah. The Samaritans after two days would say with joy and admiration: 'We have heard him and we know for sure that he is the true Saviour of the world!' And how will he save the world, and from what will he be able to save it, if not from sin and countless evils caused by sin? Oh divine Jesus, how good you are to those who give themselves to you with simplicity of heart and docile spirit!

### *The cure of the nobleman's son*

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| 43. Post duos autem dies exiit inde, et abiit in Galileam.                                | 43. <i>After the two days he departed to Galilee.</i>                                   |
| 44. Ipse enim Jesus testimonium perhibuit, quia propheta in sua patria honorem non habet. | 44. <i>For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country.</i> |

Our Lord left Sychar, where his Father's will had been accomplished, to go to Galilee, and in particular to Nazareth, where the

inhabitants did not receive him as well as the people of Sychar, as it is also recorded in the other gospels. St John understands this and here implies it (for he usually reports only what is not mentioned in the three other gospels, which he supposes to be known). That is why he says in the following verse that Jesus had foretold that he would be received badly. But this was not a reason for our Lord to remain at Sychar. So he went to Galilee and to Nazareth, although he knew he would be a scandal for many, according to the prediction of Simeon; for he foretold this to his disciples before arriving there. He told them that a prophet receives no honour in his own country.

But why is this so? Why is a prophet not honoured in his own country and why did the inhabitants of Nazareth receive the Saviour so badly? People's own malice causes it. Firstly, people form a certain natural judgment about those whom they regularly see around them. They acquire the habit of considering individuals in that natural way and continue to judge them accordingly. When they see in such a person something extraordinary and supernatural, they judge according to their usual standards — and human malice prompts them to judge the person always unfavourably. They had seen Jesus as a child like other human beings; why should he be different from the crowd? Such a desire is attributed to vanity and a hundred thousand motives which are both evil and false. A stranger, on the contrary, not in the habit of seeing those persons or considering them with familiarity and judging naturally, sees them only as they present themselves in a particular circumstance and is less inclined to judge maliciously.

Secondly, there is a worldly spirit, as in the present case. The inhabitants of Nazareth were used to seeing Jesus since his youth working in Joseph's workshop. The holy family lived quietly. Jesus had no relations with the inhabitants, neither did Mary. Only Joseph had contacts with the local people, as seems to be indicated in the other evangelists when these wicked people said: 'Is he not the son of Joseph?' or 'Is he not the carpenter's son?' and 'Is his mother not called Mary?' (Mt 13:55). They seemed to know

only Mary's name; their talk does not indicate any contact with Jesus; they had always known the family as poor and as working-class poor, little esteemed by worldly people.

Now, when people have known someone in an unfavourable light according to the detestable maxims of the world, those who follow such standards can never imagine that a person who was far below them in status could in fact be exceptionally gifted. They cannot abide that he may wish to rise above them; they will never submit to him. And so it is that this unfortunate worldly spirit deprives those who are led by it of the greatest of graces, which are within their grasp.

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| 45. Cum ergo venisset in Galileam<br>exceperunt eum Galilaei, cum<br>omnia vidissent quae fecerat<br>Jerosolymis in die Festo: et<br>ipsi enim venerunt ad diem<br>festum. | 45. <i>So when he came to<br/>Galilee, the Galileans<br/>welcomed him, having seen<br/>all that he had done in<br/>Jerusalem at the feast, for<br/>they too had gone to the<br/>feast.</i> |
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However, elsewhere in Galilee our Lord was well received, because the Galileans had gone to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover and seen all the wonders he had worked there. Having seen so many marvels they felt obliged to believe there was nothing extraordinary about him, but their faith was not good and solid. They surrendered only because they could not help doing so after seeing such extraordinary things and they yielded only halfheartedly.

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| 46. Venit ergo iterum in Cana<br>Galileae, ubi fecit aquam<br>vinum, et erat quidam<br>regulus, cujus filius infir-<br>mabatur Capharnaum. | 46. <i>So he came again to Cana<br/>in Galilee, where he had<br/>made the water wine. And<br/>at Capernaum there was<br/>an official whose son was<br/>ill.</i> |
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47. Hic cum audisset quia  
Jesus adveniret a Judaea  
in Galileam, abiit ad eum,  
et rogabat eum ut descenderet,  
et sanaret filium ejus:  
incipiebat enim mori.

47. *When he heard that Jesus  
had come from Judea to  
Galilee, he went and  
begged him to come down  
and heal his son, for he  
was at the point of death.*

Our Lord returned to Cana, where he was particularly famous because of the miracle of changing water into wine. At Capernaum there was an official whose son was dangerously ill in that town and close to death. This man having heard of our Lord's miracles, went to Cana to beg him to come and cure his son. The man did not have faith in our Lord; he had a sick son, there were no remedies and he was going to lose him, so having heard about the many cures and other miracles done by our Lord, he wanted to get this cure without reflecting further on the mission of him who would cure his son. What pre-occupied him was his son's illness and how to get him cured. There was no supernatural thought whatever in his mind to influence him. So he came to have recourse to our Lord as one goes to a doctor, hoping he would go down with him and cure his son. Perhaps he resorted to this as a desperate means, which would cost nothing but yet offered little hope. But it does not look like this. It seems he counted on getting the cure, but without going to the trouble of finding out how and by what power our Lord acted.

48. Dixit ergo Jesus ad eum:  
Nisi signa et prodigia  
videritis, non creditis.

48. *Jesus therefore said to him,  
"Unless you see signs  
and wonders you will not  
believe."*

If the man did not have the faith, it was because he had not witnessed any miracle. He was like the generality of the Jews of that time, who could be moved only by miracles. He had heard stories of wonderful things done by Jesus, but it had left him unmoved, just like them. They would often be lost in admiration at the

accounts of his deeds but have no supernatural sentiment. But when he gave witness, some people were affected by the miracles and by our Lord's presence, as well as by the way our Lord acted and by what he said. That is why our Lord said to this official: 'If you do not see miracles, you do not believe'. He reproached him with much gentleness so as to make him enter into himself and obtain his son's cure by an act of faith. But the man was too pre-occupied with his son's trouble and his desire to see him cured. It made him incapable of thinking of anything else and of raising up his heart to God. This is what normally happens when people are preoccupied with a natural inclination, however legitimate and honest its object may be; it makes them incapable of listening to God, being faithful to divine grace and raising their hearts to him.

49. Dicit ad eum regulus:  
Domine, descende priusquam  
moriatur filius meus.

49. *The official said to him,  
"Sir, come down before my  
child dies."*

This poor official paid no attention to our Lord's words and reaped no benefit from them. He saw that our Lord, instead of setting out right away to go with him, was giving him instruction. So he became excited and said: 'Sir, you are busy now with a matter of very little importance while my son is in danger of dying, even as you are speaking. Why not come quickly, I beg you, in case we find him already dead'. This is what he meant. He did not think our Lord could resuscitate his son. What made him anxious was the great peace he saw in our Lord; he would have liked him to be as agitated as himself.

50. Dicit ei Jesus: Vade, filius  
tuus vivit. Credidit  
homo sermoni, quem dixit ei  
Jesus, et ibat.

50. *Jesus said to him, "Go;  
your son will live." The  
man believed the word  
that Jesus spoke to him  
and went his way.*

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| 51. Jam autem eo descendente, servi occurrerunt ei, et nuntiaverunt dicentes, quia filius ejus viveret.                      | 51. <i>As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was living.</i>  |
| 52. Interrogabat ergo horam ab eis in qua melius habuerit. Et dixerunt ei: Quia heri hora septima reliquit eum febris.       | 52. <i>So he asked them the hour when he began to mend, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."</i>          |
| 53. Cognovit ergo pater quia illa hora erat, in qua dixit ei Jesus, filius tuus vivit, et credidit ipse, et domus ejus tota. | 53. <i>The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live"; and he himself believed, and all his household.</i> |
| 54. Hoc iterum secundum signum fecit Jesus, cum venisset a Judaea in Galileam.   | 54. <i>This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.</i>   |

Our Lord had compassion on him and said: 'Go, your son is cured'. These words were so efficacious that this man, a little before so full of anxiety, became calm; he who had no faith began to believe. He well saw that Jesus did not have to go with him; he believed him to be almighty; he obeyed and went away, fully convinced that his son was cured. He paid great attention to the time when the saving word was spoken, in order to publicise the Saviour's glory and to strengthen his own faith. As soon as his servants announced the cure, he wanted to know the hour. He was no longer the man who was so occupied about his son that he paid no attention to the one whom he had begged to cure him; now he



seemed more concerned with our Lord than with his son. Servants came to announce the cure he longed for, and immediately he wanted to know the hour so as to be clear in his own mind (as to when it had happened). This would strengthen his faith, and enable him to recognise and help others recognise how great the favour was and who had bestowed it. Not only was he faithful to the grace he had received, but he became the apostle of his whole family, so that the miraculous grace of his son's cure was spread throughout his household. They were all cured by the Saviour from a spiritual sickness much more complicated, much more serious and much more dangerous than his son's illness.

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# JESUS JEWISH EYES

A SPIRITUAL COMMENTARY  
ON THE  
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

Francis Mary Paul Libermann CSSp  
*Translated by Myles L. Fay CSSp*

PART 1  
*Chapters I-IV*

How does a modern Jew see Jesus? Francis Libermann's conversion to Christianity belongs to a Jewish movement towards Jesus dating to the mid-decades of the 19th century in France. Born in Saverne in eastern France in 1802, Francis Libermann was the son of the local rabbi. As his father's favourite son, he was meant to succeed him. But when he left the ghetto, he drifted into fashionable French atheism. The light came with a copy of St John's Gospel in unpointed Hebrew which a fellow student asked him to translate.

Baptized a Catholic on Christmas Eve 1826, Libermann decided to study for the priesthood in the Paris diocese. He went on, however, to found a missionary society. This he subsequently merged with the Holy Ghost Congregation. Libermann wrote this commentary in 1840 while awaiting papal approval for his mission initiatives.

Libermann's devotion to Jesus was intense. He saw him as the Holy One of Israel in human flesh. Everything a devout and zealous Jew feels about his God is experienced by Libermann in his relationship with Jesus. For him, he is the Messiah the Saviour. To know him is to live. Everything else in life must be subordinated to this adoring and loving rapport. That relationship is real, reciprocal, communicative, implying immediate and mutual knowledge. That knowledge brings him, like Moses before the burning bush, to his knees before the mystery of God revealed to his loving gaze.

The Gospel of St John for Francis Libermann was not a book about the past but about the way he and every Christian called to faith can relate to the One True God made flesh in Jesus Christ.